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The Love Issue: Romantic Dining, Wedding & Honeymoon Destinations, & the Valentine Gift Guide

January 22-February 4, 2015



Senior Living Issue:
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The Love ISSUE

Romantic Dining,
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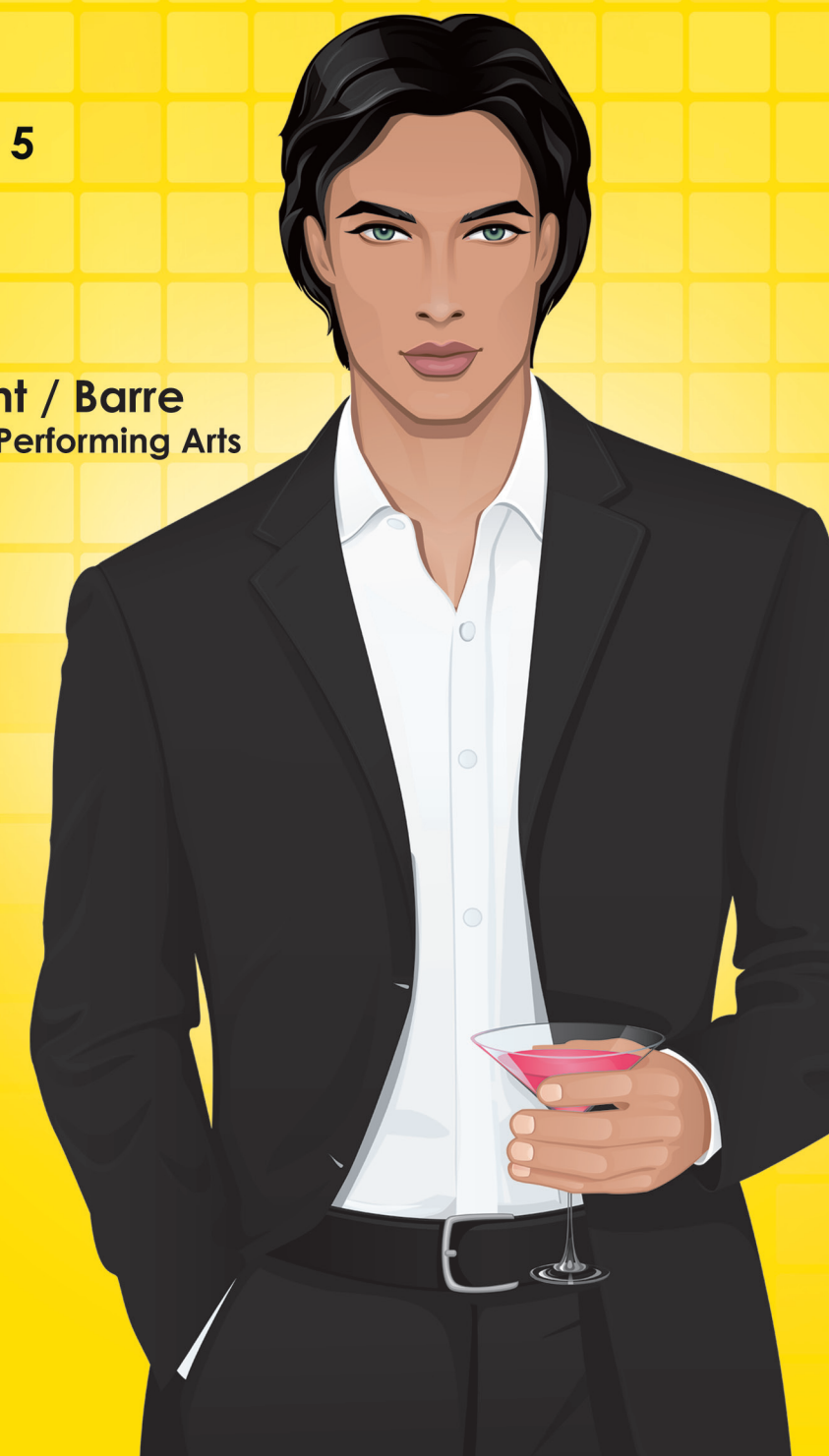
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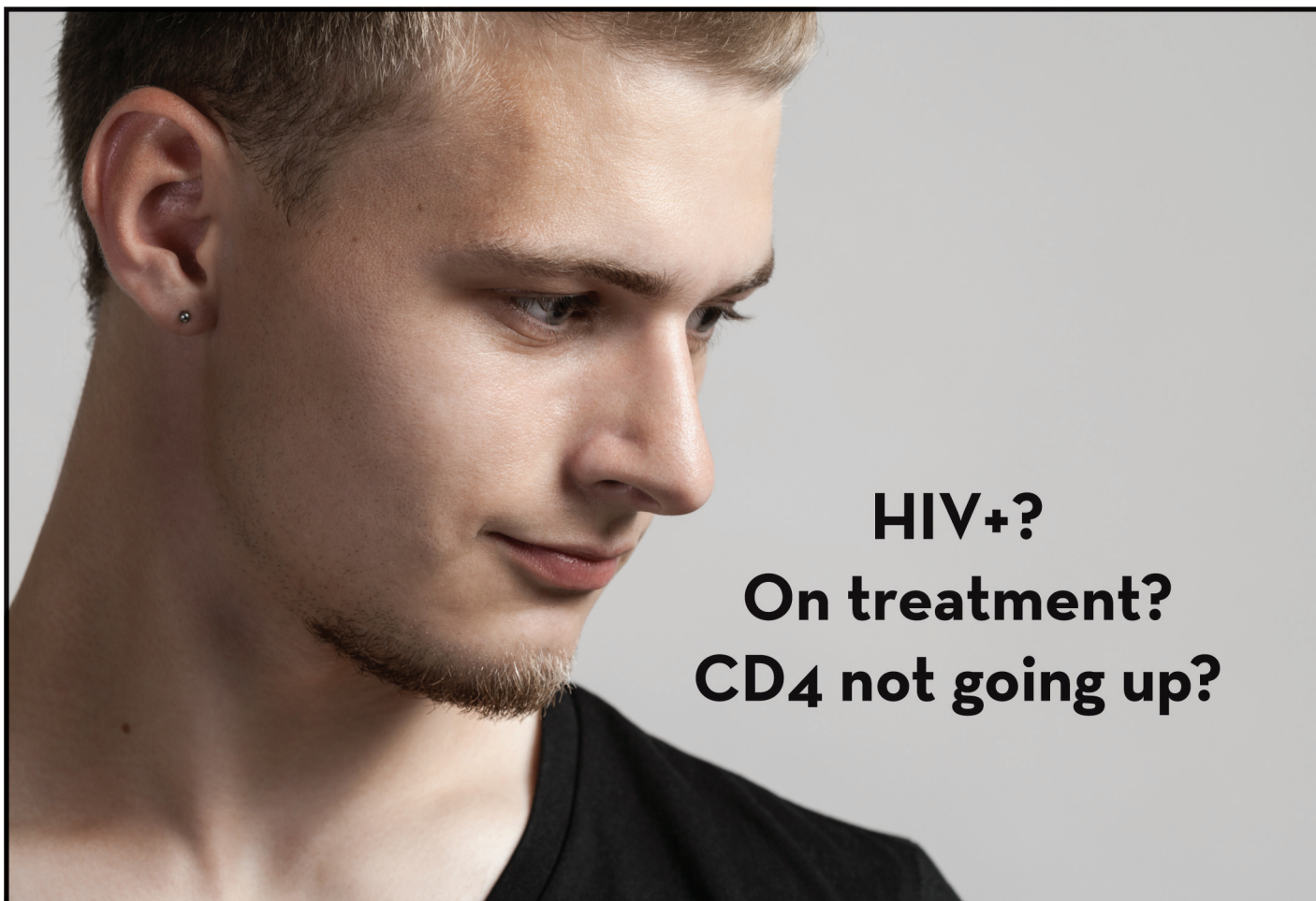
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The Love Issue: Say "I do" to a destination wedding!
Photo courtesy of Palm Springs Bureau of Tourism



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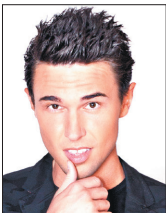
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Volume 20, Issue 513 • January 22-February 4, 2015

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612-436-4664 **Subscriptions**

612-436-4660 **Distribution**

612-436-4698 **Advertising**

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An Other Love

The Love Issue. Calling it that makes me think of the quip, “When talking about love when, aren’t there issues?” Love is an issue. Love has issues. Love is at issue.

Love is based in care. There’s the romantic, lovey-dovey love; but at its foundation, love is about respect, concern, and regard for ourselves and others. Our world. Our fellow citizens. Our communities. And, within the topics of love and care, I’ve been pondering the concepts of self-care and other-care. Self-care is fairly known. There is a large body of work out there regarding self-care and what it involves, with various definitions that don’t always agree with each other. We hear about it all the time on talk shows and in pop-psychology. It ranges from the idea that we can’t take care of others until we take care of ourselves, both literal and figurative hierarchies of needs (is internet connection as important as shelter?), fundamental hygiene and daily maintenance...both physical and psychological care and the mish-mash of everything in-between.

Then, there is this idea of other-care. There isn’t as much published about this concept, but I’m guessing it can be just as broad or narrow of a definition as what self-care includes. What I’m learning is that other-care is relational and has to do with how we let others take care of us. This is where I tend to stop in my tracks. As each of us has different personalities, so do we have different approaches to our relationships with others. Mine tends to be that of a caretaker. My focus is split between analyzing myself and my actions and how they affect others; helping people, facilitating communication, being a sounding board, offering advice or ice cream or a daytrip to escape the doldrums. But letting others take care of me? What is this notion? I’m a self-reliant, liberated woman and I do what I want! I drive a Jeep! I’m invincible! You can’t make me be cared for! See where this is going? Yeah. Nowhere great. Or, nowhere as great as what can be possible.

Walls contain space and people and property and belongings. Walls provide security, walls keep things out and in. Physically, they are lines of demarcation, not permeable. More abstractly, they are barriers to what we allow in—or out—of our lives. Not allowing others inside the walls means that we are safe with ourselves, but we can be pretty lonely and isolated, both physically and psychologically. Not pushing people out beyond our walls can be dangerous, depending on the conditions of the relationship. This time of year, when we do things like publish “The Love Issue,” when the weather is cold in Minnesota and darkness still ends late and starts early, it’s important to remember that self-care involves other-care. We are not meant to be the sole providers of our care; humans are social creatures and our care requires more than what I lovingly refer to as my “Committee of One.”

What I would do for my others is what my others would likely do for me. And how wonderful is that? Because we love each other—or at least like each other—there is an expectation of care, of such a back-and-forth of regard and assistance. And I love it.

But it must be done carefully. We don’t have control over how others would care for us, and not everyone knows what is best for us. And,

there are some people with whom too intimate a psychological relationship can be inappropriate, depending on what role they play in our lives. Thankfully, we have control over allowing ourselves to be open to other-care on a case-by-case basis. That’s the in and the out of letting people into what’s contained and protected by our walls. As we let people in, our perspective expands and we can see ourselves through the eyes of someone we trust inside our walls.

There are some people I wouldn’t trust to pick a paint color for my loft, but I’ll share the most intimate thoughts, and they know some of the most important other-care for me is to simply say, “I understand.” To just nod. Or, some know when I need challenging, that I can get mired in how I think about things, and then I emerge with a better plan. On a more recreational level, some friends know when I’ve made too many decisions in the day or the week or the month and I just need to go along for the ride, doing whatever, as long as I don’t have to think. And then there are the people who send me pastries, literally or as a joke in a text message, just to acknowledge that things are a little hairy at the moment. Other-care can be as mild or as bold as the moment or conditions require.

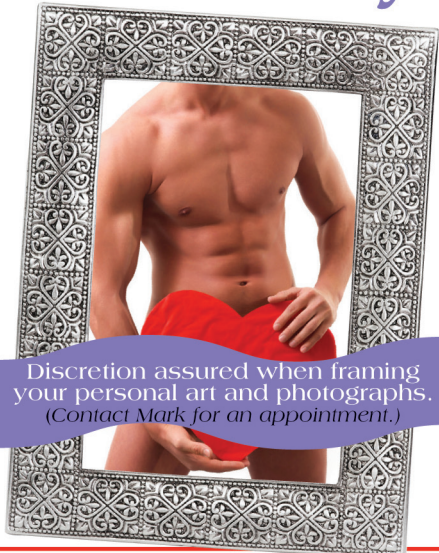
During these next months before springtime, I hope you take a look at your lives and see where you might expand your sense of what love means. If you’re seeing that your self-care could use a tune-up, consider what that might take and work toward making it happen. If you’re as unfamiliar with other-care as I was, evaluate your relationships and see where you can make some room for it, inside your walls. Be careful in your consideration. Whereas one person might be someone who can see that you might be stressed and could use a cup of coffee dropped by your desk, that person might not be the same one you’d trust with some of your mental well-being. Add other-care where it’s appropriate. The more trust you give a person, the more secure you feel with them, the more they can provide a very real role in a loving relationship, romantic or not. Your Committee of One can expand to be a Committee of Two when you want or need it. And that is a comforting thought.

I’m guessing that you’ll only be the better for it. Okay, since I’m challenging myself to do it, too, we’ll be only the better for it. We’ll be in this together, as long as I get to drive...because I’m invincible and my Jeep can drive through anything. ■



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Speaking at the funeral of one of two murdered New York police officers, Police Commissioner Bill Bratton said, in part:

Rafael Ramos was assassinated because he represented all of us, even though, beneath the uniform, he was just a good man. [...] And maybe that's our challenge.

Maybe that's the reason for the struggle we're now in—as a city, as a nation. Maybe it's because we've all come to see only what we represent, instead of who we are [...] The police, the people who are angry at the police, the people who support us but want us to be better, even a madman who assassinated two men because all he could see was two uniforms, even though they were so much more. [...]

If we can learn to see each other... then when we see each other, we'll heal. We'll heal as a department. We'll heal as a city. We'll heal as a country.

Seeing one another is not the norm in our society: officers Ramos and Liu were murdered, randomly, because they were policemen; black shopper John Crawford was gunned down in a Walmart for holding a BB gun sold in that store—in Ohio, an open carry state.

Seeing clearly can be achieved, sometimes at great cost to the seer. On June 21, 1964, three Freedom Riders, James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, were murdered by Mississippi Klansmen. Martin Luther King, Jr. biographer Taylor Branch, interviewed in the January, 2015, *Smithsonian* magazine, recounts that in the later confessions of Schwerner's murderer and a witness, each separately stated that moments before he was shot, the 24-year-old, prodded with the killer's gun, had simply said, “Sir, I know just how you feel.”

Branch defined Schwerner's extraordinary words as “the epitome” of King's active nonviolence: “You're not giving in to your terror, your anger, and you're trying to make some sort of contact with a snarling animal. There's an expression of faith that there's something human, even with no sign of it.”

Schwerner's words are also a stunning example of what Bratton is asking when he urges Americans to “See one another.” It requires going beyond the physical, being what King called a “moral witness” to the other, to affect our nation's healing. ■

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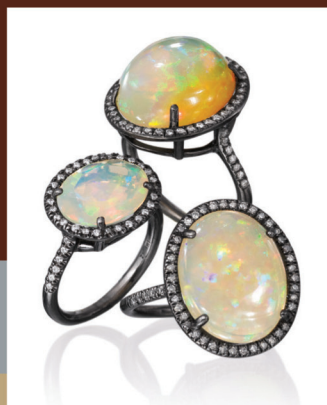
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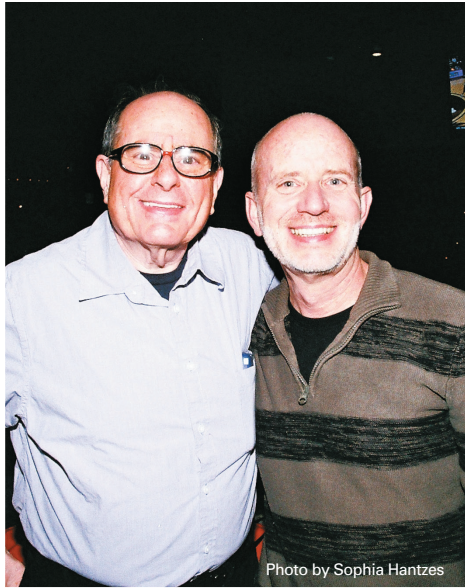


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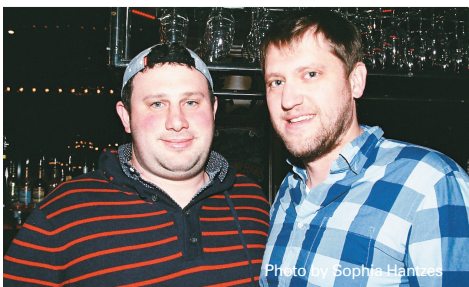


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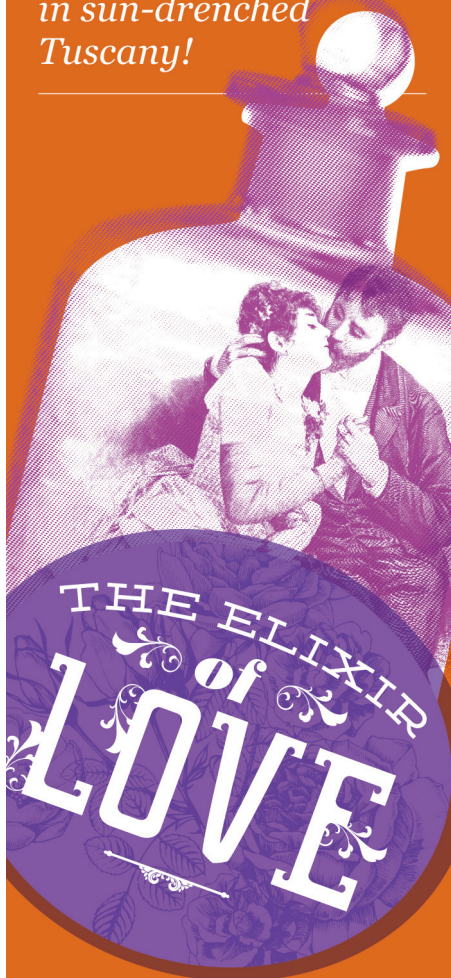
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"OLIVER!" ACTOR BRADLEY GREENWALD'S RISE TO THE TWIN CITIES' TOP TIER

Bradley Greenwald is one of the most acclaimed and popular Twin Cities-based actors. Though he is noted for his classical and operatic vocals he wasn't even exposed to that dimension of music until he was an adult. Moreover, Greenwald didn't start acting as an adult until age 35. And that wasn't a supporting musical role. It was the epic non-musical lead in Harvey Fierstein's *Torch Song Trilogy* at the Jungle Theater. However, you can see him in a major musical role as Fagin in Theater Latté Da and Hennepin Theatre Trust's Broadway Reimagined production of Lionel Bart's *Oliver!* As a youth, Greenwald was involved with band and Civic Summer Theater in his hometown of Fairmont, Minnesota. Classical music and opera were totally out of his sphere. As an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities, he was not a music major but a German major with aspirations to teach. In his sophomore year he took voice lessons with Barbra Kiereg who introduced him

to German classical music: Schubert, Schumann, Wolf. This led to singing in Vern Sutton's esteemed Opera Workshop. Greenwald remarks, "I thought, *This is opera? This is great!*" In 1989, the student took what he thought would be just time off from the U of M to join Minnesota Opera's tour of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly* which led to roles in Britten's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Larsen's *Frankenstein*. On the opera's 1991 tour of Mozart's *The Magic Flute*, Greenwald met future husband, tech crew member John Novak. He says they were married "in spirit in 1991; in the eyes of the State of Minnesota, on our 23rd anniversary, September 22, 2014, in our garden." When asked about how they keep their relationship strong, he says, "That's a skill set. After 23 years, still learning it, always will be."

After the tour, the career stream began to flow for concerts, music theater, and workshops, Greenwald didn't return to the U, which made

Bradley Greenwald & Reed Sigmund in the 2009 world premiere of *Bert & Ernie, Goodnight!* at Minneapolis' Children's Theatre Company. Photo by Ann Marsden.





(From left) Greenwald and Steven Epp in *The Mystery of Irma Vep*; photo by Ann Marsden. Greenwald in *Torch Song Trilogy*; photo courtesy of Jungle Theater. Greenwald in *I Am My Own Wife*;

for a shift of awareness, meaning he had to, as he says, “develop quite a big bag of skills. Styles, for example: the differences in singing Baroque, Mozart, musical theater, and commercial jingles are specific skills, and if you’re fluent in switching among them, versatility would open up more work opportunities. I could already sight-sing, which means read a piece of music cold without the need of being taught the part beforehand. And this probably got me a lot of work in the beginning. I lied about certain things, like I could speak French dialogue, I could dance, I could do an Elvis impersonation. When I’d get the job, I’d scramble to learn how to do it before the contract started.”

The segue into Greenwald’s acting career seems to have happened with Theatre de la Jeune Lune’s 1994 mash-up of the Molière comedy and Mozart opera, *Don Juan Giovanni*. Innovative Jeune Lune was unique as both a world-class theater and avant-garde opera center. Greenwald seemed destined for theatrical expansion. At a gathering at Jungle Theater Artistic Director Bain Boehlke’s house, the host said that Greenwald should play the lead in the three-and-a-half hour *Torch Song Trilogy*, which by then had become a classic in both contemporary

American and gay drama.

Greenwald says that *Torch Song* was “the most overwhelming job I’d ever had. I didn’t think I was right for it! Previously, my text had always had a musical partner which provided emotional content, phrasing, and style, not only to use but work against. But with a play there’s no music. The music (in a straight play) is in the language and I didn’t know how to access that.” Nonetheless, the 2001 production was a hit with critics and audiences, alike. Greenwald, like many Jungle actors, attributes his success to Boehlke’s inspiration.

One could say that the rest is Twin Cities theater history. At the Jungle, Greenwald would go on to do two runs of Charles Ludlam’s multi-character *The Mystery of Irma Vep*, but his triumph, which *Lavender* named the best performance of the 2000s’ first decade, was two runs staged by Joel Sass of Doug Wright’s *I Am My Own Wife*, the solo bio-drama of the life of transgender German Charlotte von Mahlsdorf.

In bold contrast, he delighted audiences at the Children’s Theatre with the Sesame Street-inspired *Bert & Ernie, Goodnight!* in 2009. CTC Artistic Director Peter Brosius shares, “Whether it is creating a tender,



photo by Michal Daniel. **Greenwald as Fagin in *Oliver!***; photo by Heidi Bohnenkamp, 2014.

touchingly and hilariously exasperated Bert to Reed Sigmund's Ernie or insisting on not being a narrator but rather being on stage in the middle of the action reliving each moment of his life with increasing joy and accelerating anxiety in *A Christmas Story* or inventing the greatest crowd ever to preen and caw on any stage in *The Snow Queen*, Bradley brings such grace, intelligence, and wit to a rehearsal room and a stage. He is a mad joy to work with, smart as hell, generous, fierce, demanding, open, and playful all at once. He brings out the best in all of us: directors, actors, and audience. The warmth pours out of him, that gorgeous voice and his sly and dangerous wit are all nothing short of extraordinary."

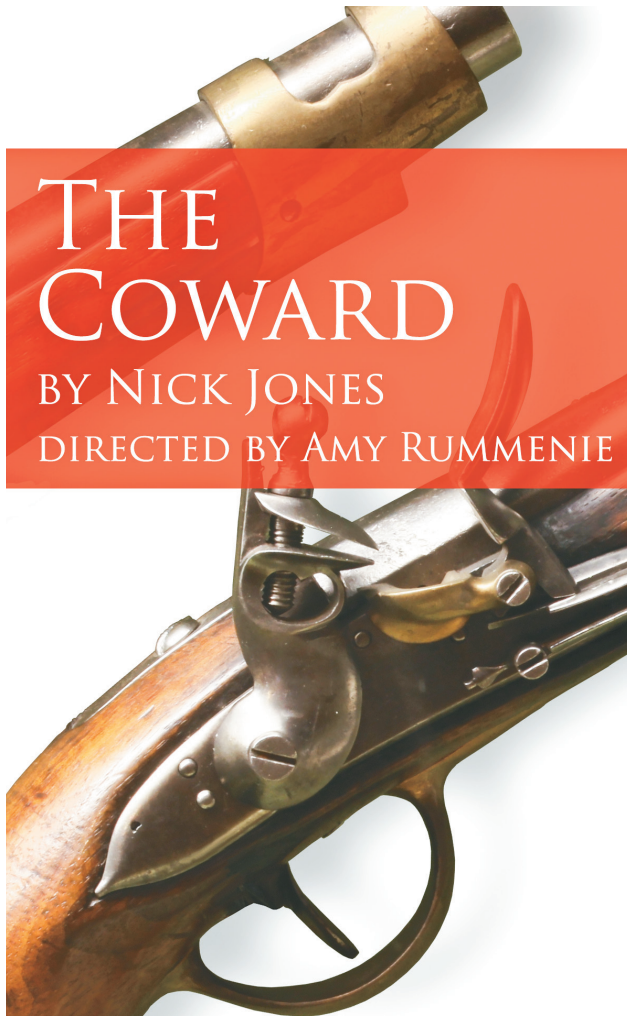
Another terrific portrayal was the iconic Emcee in Frank Theatre's terrific 2011 staging of Ebb & Kander's *Cabaret*. Director Wendy Knox: says, "Working with Bradley is a treat. He's so smart and he keeps an eye on the overall production and offers ideas and comments to make things better, helping to push the whole thing to be the best it can be. Plus an added bonus—for me—he's very funny and can be very naughty."

Cabaret and *Oliver!* are musical stalwarts with critical reflections of their societies. In the latter, Greenwald plays Fagin, who runs a theft ring

of desperately poor boys in Dickens's London. He observes that "Fagin is a mother to those boys in his own way, but they can never provide him with the really substantial hauls that (adult) Bill Sykes can bring in. These big hauls are complicated with violent behavior and cruel self-preservation." Clearly, this comment shows Greenwald as a sharp observer of text and human nature. *Oliver!* director Peter Rothstein says, "Bradley is the ideal artist to have in the rehearsal room. He is incredibly versatile as an actor and singer, but he also has a theatrical mind bursting with creativity. Bradley possesses a profound understanding of the theatrical event." ■

OLIVER!

Feb. 6 – 28
Pantages Theatre, 710 Hennepin Ave., Mpls.
(800) 982-2787
www.HennepinTheatreTrust.org



THE COWARD

BY NICK JONES

DIRECTED BY AMY RUMMENIE

The Coward. Photo courtesy of Rama

DEFYING GRAVITY

Through Feb. 21

Southern Theater, 1420 Washington Ave. S., Mpls.

(612) 340-1725

www.southerntheater.org

To be clear, this is not the song from *Wicked*, but it's a play that muses on the explosion of the spacecraft, The Challenger, which exploded in 1986 and killed all six crew members. New Hampshire schoolteacher and astronaut, Christa McAuliffe, became the focus of the aftermath as well as the inspiration for playwright Jane Anderson. The catastrophe also derailed American optimism just as the Iran-Contra scandal of the Reagan/Bush administration was starting to seriously unfold. Damon Runnels and Meg DiScirorio have co-directed the play with an eye to what Runnels calls "learning to accept the sacrifices necessary for greatness. Not in the usual sense of an individual's achievements, but instead in the expansion of our species as a whole. The story is driven by the teacher character's daughter, Elizabeth, but like impressionist paintings—which play a prominent role in the piece—the heart of this play is in the contrasting mo-

ments that are constantly shown to us. As an audience member we are always on shifting ground." Erin Roberts and Roneet Aliza play the teacher and her daughter.

THE COWARD

Feb. 6 – 28

Red Eye Theatre

15 W. 14th St., Mpls.

(800) 838-3006

www.walkingshadowcompany.org

Walking Shadow Theatre is transporting us to eighteenth century England where men defended their honor by pistol duels. What makes this staging of Nick Jones' comedy different is that women play all the roles.

Director Amy Rummenie relates, "When we first read the script for *The Coward*, we found it to be hilarious and just our kind of humor: a modern spoof of the kind of period comedies that already tickle our funny bone. But, as much as we loved it, we couldn't bring ourselves to program a show with seven men and one woman last season. We wanted to find a show that had a better gender balance, and this was wildly off the mark." "We moved on to other shows,

noting that it would have been perfect if it was just flipped, and one of us quipped offhandedly, 'What would happen if we gave the ladies all the men's roles?' We quickly realized that the show got even funnier, moving from a rather straightforward story of class to a tongue-in-cheek exploration of manliness, gender roles, and responsibility—and still keeping the original goofiness that we loved. By taking just one more step in the direction that the humor is already headed, the satirical tone gets just a little bit deeper and more interesting."

GERTRUDE STEIN AND A COMPANION

Through Mar. 8

The Jungle Theater

2915 Lyndale Ave. S., Mpls.

(612) 822-7063

www.jungletheater.com

The Jungle Theater is presenting its seventh production of the iconic lesbian love story *Gertrude Stein and a Companion* by Win Wells. No other play has been revived so many times as this one in the Jungle's 26-year history. Better yet, the same actresses who have immortalized the roles



Gertrude Stein and a Companion. Photo by Michal Daniel

are reprising them. Claudia Wilkens plays Stein and Barbara Kingsley plays Alice B. Toklas. The story spans 40 years of their relationship.

The American expatriates were renowned for their Paris salons. Creative legends such as Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, and Henri Matisse attended. Stein took liberties with language that gave her a spot in literary history. The two's bohemian relationship was one that radically challenged social norms and brought forth a template for successful long term gay relationships.

Bain Boehlke directs the play for the seventh time and it also marks the beginning of his final season as the Jungle's founding artistic director. Expect another sterling example of Boehlke as one of the nation's great text-based stage directors. Bear in mind, too, that so many Jungle productions of this play over the years means that it surely deeply reinforced positive images of long-term same-sex relationships. So think of that in terms of Minnesota's marriage equality victory. The Jungle has really done its part.

I LOVE LUCY

Through Jan. 25

State Theatre, 805 Hennepin Ave., Mpls.

(800) 982-2787

www.HennepinTheatreTrust.org

Audience members of the national tour of *I Love Lucy* on stage in 2015 will take on roles themselves as audience members at



I Love Lucy. Photo by Justin Namon



Wild. Photo courtesy of Fox Searchlight

Desilu Studios in 1952. There, an emcee describes what goes on in creating episodes for a new phenomenon known as television. The Crystalltone Singers harmonize 1950s TV ad jingles to suit the format of the live television experience. The episodes being prepared for are *The Benefit* and *Lucy Has Her Eyes Examined*. It will be a unique sort of theatrical experience for the State Theatre and Hennepin Theatre Trust.

WILD

Area movie theaters

www.foxsearchlight.com/wild

When our indicators go off-kilter and things chronically go wrong in our lives, an intervention or a bold change needs to take place. For Cheryl Strayed, her mother's untimely death threw her for such a loop that she got hooked on heroin and dangerous sexual encounters with men. To finally break the cycle she hiked the

Pacific Crest Trail. Strayed wrote a memoir about it and director Jean-Marc Vallée (*Dallas Buyers Club*) has turned it into a remarkable new film, *Wild*.

Reese Witherspoon plays Strayed and she's never been better or bolder. The Oscar-winning actress portrays the 2,650-mile hike which is the narrative's framework. Interspliced throughout are deft flashbacks, some of which are set in Minnesota, that reveal the traumas of Strayed's life. That said, *Wild* doesn't feel like a therapeutic self-absorbed exercise, an eco-polemic, or moralistically anti-drug and anti-sex. Instead, Witherspoon reflects a spiritual journey where Strayed goes from being out-of-synch to being free to move forward. Now that sounds simple but when you see this wonderful film, you realize just what an accomplishment that is. ■

INFORMATION: WHAT'S LOVE GOT TO DO WITH IT?

Tell me. I want to know. Why won't you tell me? I need to know. I have to know.

Oh, I'm sorry you told me. Why did you tell me? I wish I didn't know that.

The impulses behind those sentences have animated every human being who has walked this planet. And the odds are that, in some form or another, those instincts percolate throughout your waking hours every day.

It's enough to keep anyone's head in full spin. Especially now, when the distribution and consumption of data have assumed the proportions of a Tower of Babel that seems ready to topple at any moment.

Such is the dizzying premise behind *Love and Information*, the thought-churning, deeply poignant play by Caryl Churchill, playing at Frank Theatre January 30 through February 22. Make that 57—count 'em, 57—plays, which occupy a concentrated two (uninterrupted) hours of stage time, with a cast embodying more than a hundred questioning, frustrated, fascinated characters.

Artistic Director Wendy Knox details how the piece deals with love on all kinds of levels, from sibling to romantic (same-sex or otherwise), as it also deals with information on all kinds of levels, from personal to technological. "It also looks at our hunger for both love and information in the various aspects of our lives, and how they can inform each other," she says.

How deeply can the show delve into content when there are 57 micro-scenes? According to Knox, the content is something that is thematic and something that the audience has to piece together. She says, "The show will mean different things to different people, different scenes will impact people in different ways. I think this piece is like a kaleidoscope of various factors of contemporary life. No, I don't think the show is meant to be confusing, but it does require participation on the audiences' part in terms of putting the puzzle pieces together."

Leave it to Churchill to come up with a work that so ingeniously and exhaustively mirrors our age of the splintered attention span. Throughout her career, which covers more than four decades, this British playwright has proven herself in creating expressly topical works in which

form and function are one.

Churchill also famously never discusses her work, refusing interviews and leaving interpretations and analysis of the work's meaning up to the audience. Knox offers her opinion: "Churchill's a very smart writer and one who has tremendously impacted the form of contemporary theatre. I can't even guess what she was trying to accomplish, but she has accomplished a fascinating play that once again reinvents a theatrical form."

With 57 scenes ranging from only a few lines to a few pages of script, Churchill has given Knox and her team a challenge of interpreting her work. Knox shares, "There are no character descriptions, no stage directions. So right now, the entire cast is around the table, trying to figure out what the scenes are about, what impact age, gender, race, and class all have on the scenes as we mix up the casting. It's an enormous challenge which is really thrilling and exciting." At the time of press, the creative team and cast are still working out how scenery and costuming come into play, something Knox says the audience will have to wait to see.

Each of *Love and Information*'s self-contained segments, some of which are only seconds long, deals with the ways we lust for, process, and reject knowledge. At the same time, it teases, thwarts and gluts its audience's capacity to assimilate the forms of information it considers.

Information and knowledge impact how we understand the world and each other. "The play deals with all kinds of information in the various arenas of life, and how we as humans interact with that information," Knox says. "Sometimes we get good information, sometimes bad. Sometimes information is purely technical, sometimes highly personal. Sometimes we block information, sometimes we misinterpret information. All of those things happen in life, and the play explores all of them and paints a picture of how we interact with each other."

Some characters speak the language of science and mathematics. Others talk in the easygoing shorthand of people who have known one another for a long time. Some are blessed with total recall, while others can't remember who they are. There are scenes that are as contemporary



Love and Information cast members photographed here: Woman in yellow shirt: Joy Dolo; woman in black shirt: Taous Khazem; man in blue jeans: Patrick Bailey; man in black pants: Sam Pearson.





as cellphones and Edward J. Snowden, and as eternal as humanity itself.

Churchill and her work have had a huge impact on Frank Theatre, which has staged three of her pieces (*Top Girls*, *Mad Forest*, and *Vinegar Tom*). Knox has also directed Churchill's *Cloud Nine* twice at other venues. "I am drawn to her as a playwright because she's so very smart, is

politically astute, and is so diligent in reinventing theatrical form and her own writing," Knox says. "With this piece, she touches on so many facets of contemporary life and relationships, and she allows us the opportunity to create our own collective understanding of the work, which is a challenge that Frank thrives on." ■

OUR SCENE

ARTS & CULTURE | ON THE RECORD
BY ED HUYCK



HOZIER *Hozier*

I spent the day before Hozier's debut dropped listening to Elton John. That seemed apt, as the Irish singer-songwriter's fluid baritone and piano-driven first hit ("Take Me To Church") remind the listener of the great Reg. As it turns out, Hozier offers a more diverse sound than just Elton John worship. He embraces a wide swath of traditional American sounds, from the blues to soul to gospel to even tinges of countrified folk on this engaging and beguiling debut. The traditional sounds are aided by a real down-to-earth vibe that makes straightforward love songs like "Real People Do" and "Someone New" sound grand. At times, Hozier's same-sounding phrasing can get in the way, but his gorgeous voice eventually carries the day.



PRINCE *Art Official Age*

Welcome back, Prince. All is forgiven (well, maybe not *Chaos and Disorder*). The Purple One unleashes his best music in two decades on these albums. First up is "Art Official Age," a funky throwback that mixes in plenty of old-school references (check out the electronic drums; like it is "1999") and typically far-out lyrics that imagine a future without time, greed, or heartbreak. Utopian or not, the songs chart a diverse course, from sexy funk ("The Gold Standard") to, er, sexy slow jams ("This Could Be Us") to ballads that likely have sex at their heart (come on, this is a Prince album). The goofy science-fiction elements—45 years in the future, Prince wakes up into a much-changed world—don't get in the way.



PRINCE AND 3RDEYEGIRL *Plectrumelectrum*

Meanwhile, Prince gets his rock on throughout this album with his latest backing band. 3rdeyegirl is a tight trio, and they help remind us that, along with everything else, our hero is a terrific leader. The quartet plays as a tight unit through this set, which features a more down-to-earth vibe than *Art Official Age*. His support even gets into the songwriting act, like on the title tune. The next generation of Minnesota musicians show up as well, as the Chalice show up to add raps and singing on the infectious "Boytrouble." There's also plenty of hot guitar playing spread throughout the release, such as the extended solo on "Anotherlove" (spaces between words are so 20th century) or the funky breakdowns in opener "Wow."



TONY BENNETT AND LADY GAGA *Cheek to Cheek*

That this is called *Cheek to Cheek* and not, say, *Cheek to Freak* gives you an idea of the vibe these two are up to here. This isn't a David Bowie/Bing Crosby cross-over. Instead this is a pretty straightforward big-band-style jazz album showcasing the distinct vocal chops of each singer. The two can sing the hell out of standards like "Sophisticated Lady" and "Anything Goes." The backing group has similar chops, taking their turns in the spotlight throughout the 11 song, 35-minute set. In the end, it's a little too slick for my tastes. I like plenty of rough edges on my music, and the arid, flat production and tasteful performances just don't give me pizzazz to come back for repeated listens. ■

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Tallinn Estonia old city center.

Enticing Estonia

And now, as they say, for something completely different. Estonia shares a border with Russia, but not many happy sentiments, as Obama's recent speech in Tallinn, its capitol, reinforced. Envied for its location on the Baltic Sea, Estonia has been overrun by Swedes, Danes, Germans, and Russians, including the Soviets who rescued the country from the Nazis only to outstay their visit until the famed Singing Revolution in 1991. Estonia is now a leading member of the EU, and attuned, instead, to its Nordic neighbors with a similar clean sense of design, love of nature, ebullient wit, and feisty spirit.

The airport, dressed in bright, spicy colors, is only three miles from the Old City, still bound by medieval walls spliced by guard towers (one is named Fat Margaret). Within lies a UNESCO-protected storybook setting of cobblestone streets hugging Gothic manor houses, centuries-old churches whose spires still pierce the sky, and Town Square, the hub of the city for 800 years. Here a historic pharmacy still stands where it once dispensed roasted bees, fish eyes, and cats' blood as remedies, but those neighboring medieval mansions now house classy crafts boutiques and cafés with umbrella-topped tables. "It's a Medieval Disneyland," laughs



Tallinn, Estonia; Russian Orthodox church, Estonia. Photos by Carla Waldemar



our guide, Uve, pointing out the eleventh-century Great Guild Hall and its neighbor, the Church of the Holy Spirit—oldest in town—where I later return for a free organ concert.

But this is not a cloying throwback to Ye Good Old Days: Tallinn buzzes with energy and creative juices that vault it ahead of its neighbors—the inventors of Skype (as they're eager to remind us), with free Wi-Fi everywhere; designers of duds and home gear ready for their close-ups in glossy magazines; creators of forward art and music and cuisine and whatever else you care to name.

Indeed, the most popular attraction is the newly-launched Seaplane Harbor, housed in the 1916 hangars built by Russian Tsar Nicholas to defend St. Petersburg. Hands-on, interactive displays explore what's underwater, from the earliest shipwreck ever found to a World War II submarine (climb right in) and torpedo simulator (ready, aim...), then segues to vessels atop the water, from a primitive dugout to a motorboat from the '30s, a seaplane, and defense cannon.

For a panorama of the Old Town, visitors can claim a bird's eye view via a brand-new, tethered helium balloon. Those spires you spot belong to St. Alexander Nevsky, the bulb-domed Russian Orthodox Cathedral, while the spare white steeple is St. Olaf's, which, in the fourteenth century, was the tallest building in the world. Medieval St. Nicholas now serves as a museum for medieval art, including the admonitory "Dance of Death." The town's history museum celebrates Estonia's spirit of survival, as ten foreign powers take turns occupying the country over the last 800 years—most recently the Soviets, who conducted mass deportations to Siberia via cattle cars, as the somber Museum of Occupation (Nazi, too) testifies.

During the Cold War, the Viru Hotel served as headquarters for the feared KGB. A visit to the 23rd-floor inner sanctum displays ashtrays bugged with microphones, the hotline phone direct to Moscow. Earlier Russians, then Soviets, used the bastion tunnels surrounding the Old Town as a prison, then bomb shelter. Today, we follow a guide under-

ground to spy where punks hid out from their oppressors and, post-freedom, the homeless in their squats.

Back in the daylight of Catherine's Passage, we troll through working artisans' shops for designer garb in leather, wool and linen; I overload my suitcase with treasures from the design collective Eesti Esindus. Tallinn's sense of style extends to its kitchens. Hotel breakfasts could double as Sunday brunch, while restaurants like Noa (as in Noah's Ark) celebrate seafood aside the sea, with pure and simple fare such as salted whitefish with cucumbers and dill sauce or pike-perch with new potatoes.

Nejkid, rates in the Top 50 of Estonia's restaurants, sports cosmopolitan renditions of ultra-local products, as in smoked duck with rhubarb; lamb with red cabbage-cherry sauce and a pea-mint salad; and moose steak with blueberries. Leib stays close to home with an Estonian beef filet aside local carrots and chanterelles; quail with zucchini-green bean salad; and crème brûlée with black bread. Kaks Kokka ("two cooks") treated us to smoked herring salad with salted cucumbers and home-grown tomatoes; a chilled pea-cucumber soup with crayfish tails; and dessert of strawberries, cherries, and mint ice cream.

Estonians are passionate about nature. Find it at its purest in Lahemaa National Park, an hour from Tallinn, where bog-walking is a year-round sport. Strap on plastic "snowshoes" to bounce your way across the spongy surface. Then reward yourself with lunch at seaside MerMer, served summertime in a converted barn and in winter, aside a cozy fire by two escapees from the city who grow and prepare feasts that segue from steaming homemade bread and cured salmon salad to chicken with potatoes and chanterelles.

The way we Minnesotans love our lakes, Estonians adore the Baltic Sea—especially the skein of islands dropped like pancake batter not far from the coast. Hop a ferry to Muhu, two hours from the city, and Nautse Mihkli, the oldest farm on the island, whose thatched cottage urban émigrés Ingrem and Kaler Randjoe restored to offer cooking classes and

CONTINUED ON PAGE 28 ➔



Beet ice cream and blueberry manna cotta, and a ladies' dance group Nauste Mihkli guesthouse on Muhu Island, Estonia. Photos by Carla Waldemar

meals straight from the woods and water, like our feast of pike quenelles, redbuck tenderloin, and beet ice cream with blueberry panna cotta. Guest cottages beckon. So does the sauna. Nearby, in another woodland cottage, Ea and Stephen Green not only make and sell enticingly-scented organic soaps, but also teach visitors the skill.

Muhu is the anteroom, connected by a bridge to Saaremaa, the country's largest island, whose capitol city, Kuressaare (which hardly earns that fancy title) boasts a main street studded with way-too-enticing regional craft shops leading to a medieval castle fortress guarding the shoreline and—the town's forte—spas galore.

We circle back to Muhu for the grand finale—an overnight at Pädaste

Manor, which host, Martin Breuer, painstakingly restored from centuries of crumbling for the express purpose of coddling his guests. Its restaurant, Alexander, has been voted "Best in Estonia" three years running for its focus on Nordic Islands fare like Baltic needlefish with seabuckthorn and local roe deer with beets and black currants. Says Martin, come here to chill out. "We have no waterfalls, no mountains, just the innocence of the islands where nature calls to you. Embrace it." ■

For information, visit www.visitestonia.com. For GLBT-friendly info in this very welcoming country, check www.tallinn.gaymap.ee.

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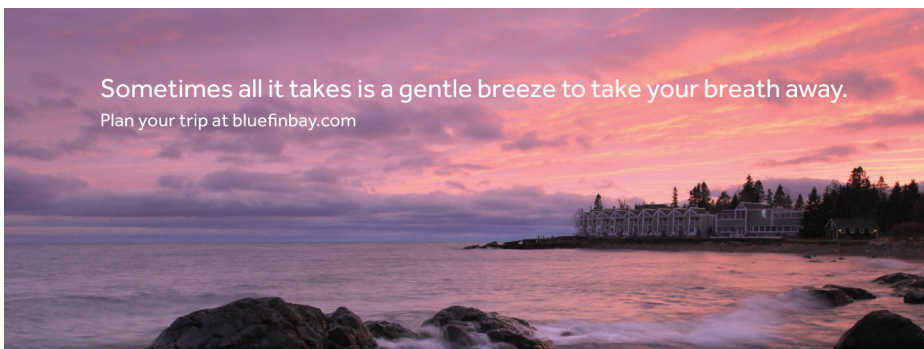
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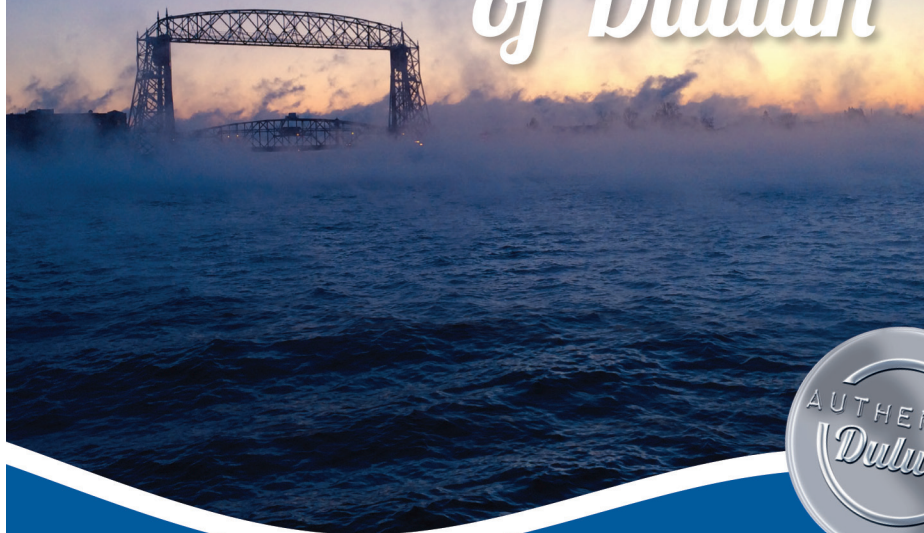


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Shannon Miller, and the Question No One is Asking

The State of Hockey is in a state of mourning. J.P. Parise, former NHL All-Star, former head of the renowned Shattuck-Saint Mary's hockey program and father of Wild player Zach, passed away after a battle with lung cancer.

The Wild, as of press time, is on a losing streak.

And Shannon Miller, Head Coach of the University of Minnesota, Duluth women's hockey team, she of five national titles, ten NCAA playoff appearances, seven Frozen Four appearances and a Silver Medal as coach of the Canadian National Team in the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympics, was informed in December that her contract would not be renewed following the current season (along with the rest of her staff).

The move has prompted outcry not only in Duluth, where she is a local celebrity, but nationally, as the headlines scream sexism and cite Title IX.

Those articles make valid points. Miller was told she was being let go strictly for financial reasons, and UMD Athletic Director Josh Berlo was quoted by MPR News, saying "Today's decision about Shannon's contract was

an immensely difficult and *financially driven decision*. Unfortunately, UMD Athletics is not in a position to sustain the current salary levels of our women's hockey coaching staff." Miller is the highest-paid female coach in the nation. Emphasis on *female*. Never mind the fact that the UMD men's hockey coach, he of no national titles with the Bulldogs, a mediocre record, and no Olympic medals, makes \$20k more than Coach Miller and is retaining his job.

So yes, I'd say some clear discrimination comes into play. But what type? None of the headlines ask what, to me, is the most obvious question.

Is Shannon Miller being let go because she's openly lesbian?

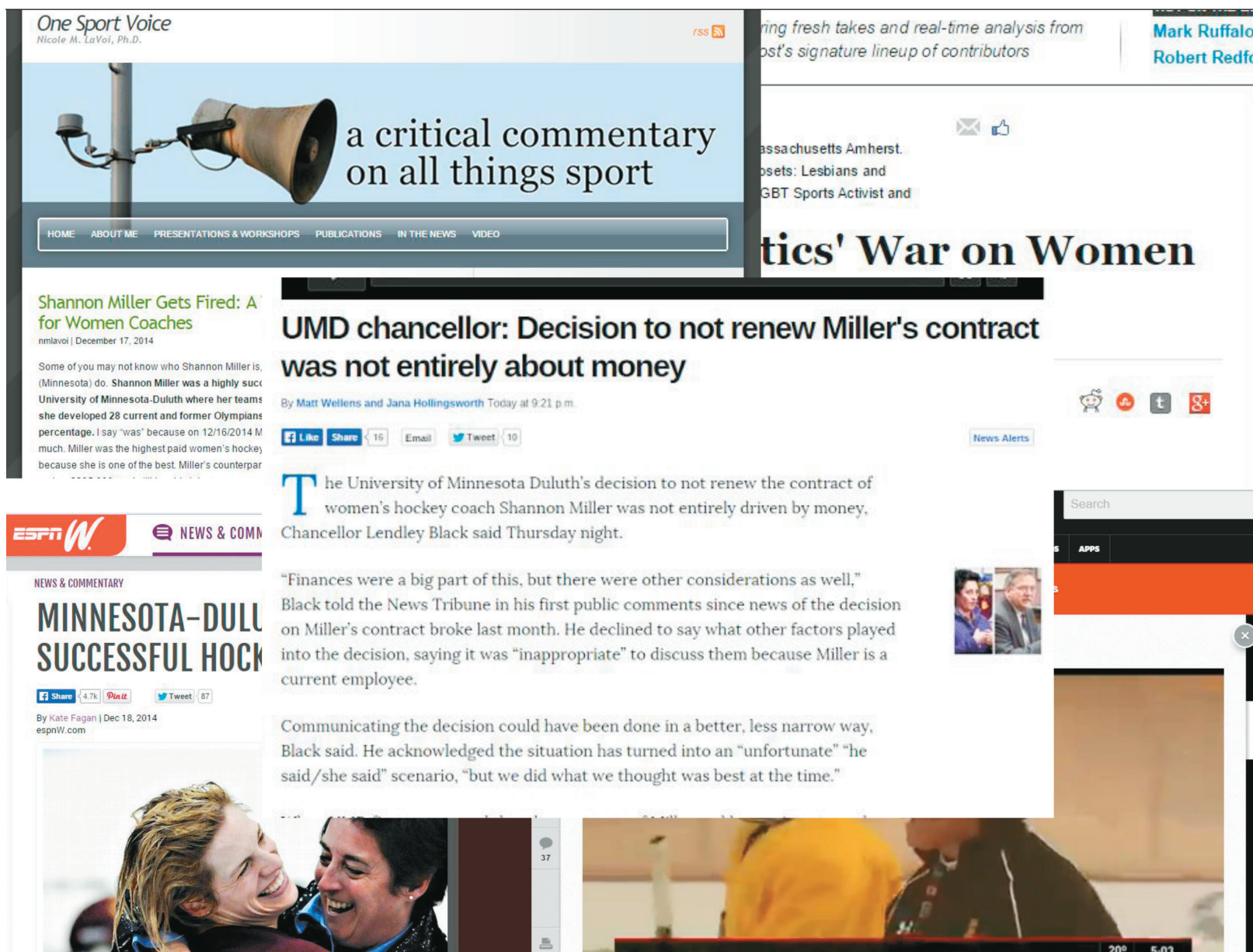
Now, I promise you, I'm not always the first to wave the rainbow flag and cry discrimination. When Michael Sam didn't make the Rams final roster post-preseason, I blamed their solid depth at his position. He was picked up by the Cowboys practice squad and I assumed his NFL career would resume with a team who valued a former SEC Defensive Player of the Year. It wasn't until he was dropped by the Cowboys and passed on by all remaining 31 teams in the NFL (many with-

out any depth at his position) that I began to see that yes, homophobia was still at play.

However, as the news of Miller's contract non-renewal made the rounds, nowhere was Miller's sexuality a main talking point. Why? Is it because her counterpart on the men's team is a straight male with a worse record and higher salary, so sexism is the easier (and safer) argument? Is it because she's been out of the closet for so long that it begs the question "Why now?" Is it because we don't believe that homophobia could so obviously exist in Minnesota in 2015?

Probably all of these, but just the fact that Miller and her entire coaching staff, the only all-gay coaching staff in the country to my knowledge, were let go as a group, without any opportunity to renegotiate contracts, as Miller has said she was open to, hints that money was not the primary decider.

UMD has since admitted as much. In an online article for Inside Higher Ed, "Chuck Tombarge, a spokesman for the University of Minnesota at Duluth, said that while Miller's salary was a key consideration, there were other factors that went into the decision not to renew the coach's contract, including 'the direction of



the program.” In a statement echoed to the Duluth News Tribune by UMD Chancellor Lendley Black on Thursday, January 8, Tombarge said Miller was not offered a pay cut because “a pay cut alone would not have addressed all of the considerations” involved in the decision.

Miller spoke to the media at her weekly press conference at Amsoil Arena later in the day on the 8th and addressed those revelations.

“I want to be clear and I want to be honest, in all the meetings I had with Josh (Berlo)—and we talked about it five different times—the only reason I was given is financial. Strictly

financial. And those were his words over and over again, consistently. So it’s disappointing for me to read somebody saying, from the institution, or a spokesperson, saying, ‘We weren’t happy with the direction of the program.’ That’s disturbing to say the least—that a spokesperson would say something like that, and Josh wouldn’t have the courage to have that conversation with me if it is a concern.”

Miller has hired attorneys to represent her in an upcoming lawsuit, and most likely, they’ll make a case citing Title IX as well. It’s difficult and probably impossible to prove homophobia

without evidence. But that doesn’t mean that we, the public, can’t be suspicious. And I certainly am. Josh Berlo is a new athletic director and new to Duluth. Shannon Miller is a strong and successful lesbian coach with a 17-year history in the community.

Miller is a living legend in the world of women’s hockey, with a winning percentage over .700 and a team currently ranked 6th in the nation. She *was* the draw to the UMD women’s hockey program. As this story continues to unfold, my eyes are turned north. ■

Imperial Court of Minnesota Hosts Coronation XXIII

Since its founding in 1992, the Imperial Court of Minnesota (ICOM), primarily a fundraising organization according to its mission statement, has brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars for myriad local charities. ICOM has its fun side, too, with plenty of crowns and gowns at events that raise money as well.

That will be most evident at ICOM's grandest spectacle of the year, Coronation XXIII, on the evening of February 7 at the host hotel, the Radisson Blu in Downtown Minneapolis. The theme is "Just Be: Be Who You Are, Be Who You Want To Be."

ICOM is a monarchical organization, which means that an emperor and empress elected each year preside over activities. At Coronation XXIII, Regent Emperor XXII, Mark Weston, and Regent Empress XXII, Helen Back, will step down after a successful reign. That night, newly elected monarchs will be crowned and will commence their reign.

Other related activities take place the weekend of Coronation XXIII: the Out of Town Show on February 6 at the Saloon in Minneapolis; and the Brunch on February 8 also at the Saloon.

For more information, visit www.impcourtminn.org.

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Where Should We Go for Valentine's Day?



Every year, as Valentine's Day approaches, my partner and I ponder the same question, "Where should we go for dinner?" We love to celebrate the holiday with a great meal. Who doesn't? Actually, truth be told, we really just love to have a legitimate excuse to go out and eat.


And Valentine's Day, gratefully, is the perfect excuse.

Finding the perfect place to dine, however, isn't always easy. Among the embarrassment of restaurant riches in the Twin Cities, our options are ever-growing. If simply having a great meal is the goal, the metro area is our oyster. Mmm. Oysters. I could rattle off a dozen wonderful places in a heartbeat that would lead to a memorable, or at the very least, perfectly enjoyable evening.

But Valentine's Day is usually different than your garden variety night out. Most people are looking for something a little (or a whole heck of a lot) more romantic. The problem is, everyone has their own definition of romantic. And that definition can change from year to year. Sometimes it means mood lighting, white table cloths and roses. Other times, burgers at your favorite hole in the wall.

If you're a new couple, you're likely to be a bit more lavish than those of us who've been through a few. If, God forbid, you thought it was a great idea to go on a first date on Valentine's Day, you'll want to impress without freaking out your potential future special someone. And not wanting to leave out the (intentionally and otherwise) single among us, who's to say

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Dining room at Meritage.
Photo by Hubert Bonnet

you too shouldn't have a few options to go out and enjoy the night with friends, while simultaneously giving happy couples the stink eye?

If, like me, you struggle to find the perfect place to celebrate Valentine's Day and feel totally overwhelmed by the possibilities, you're in luck. I'm going to make your job super easy this year by giving you four sure-fire options guaranteed to suit most any mood or arrangement. Feel free to return the favor. I'm always looking for new ideas.

Side note: some of the restaurants listed below may have special menus for Valentine's Day. If that's your thing, feel free to ask when making a reservation or when you arrive. I'm not a particular fan of special menus that limit my selfish appetite, so I'm including four restaurants I know stand fully on their own, holiday special or not.

Meritage in St. Paul

If you're an old-fashioned romantic (or dating one) who'd love nothing more than to spend Valentine's Day at a beautiful little restaurant in Paris, but don't have the necessary swagger (or bank account) to pull it off, head no further than downtown St. Paul to Meritage. The ambience, surroundings and, of course, food will transport you a lot more economically than a flight to Charles de Gaulle. And if you're worried French cuisine is too complicated or stuffy, fear not.

The food is simple, accessible and totally satisfying. Pay special attention to the moules frites and oysters Meritage. Our first visit was for an anniversary dinner and we still count that meal as one of our best. Ever.

Joan's in the Park

This intimate, white table-clothed hidden gem in the Highland Park

neighborhood of St. Paul is a perfect spot for any couple wanting classic fine dining without all the fuss. At Joan's in the Park, you feel like you're at the home of a dear friend who's invited you over for dinner. That is, if your dear friend happened to be a highly acclaimed chef with ample national recognition. If you want to earn Valentine's Day bonus points from your paramour, order the crab toasts and steak tartare. Speaking of steak, you'd do well to try the ribeye. I still look upon that piece of meat more fondly than I do some exes. No joke.

The bar at Manny's

Let's say you want to class up your Valentine's Day night out, but not too much. Maybe you're on a first date or a few dates in and you want to impress, but not freak out or scare off. The bar at Manny's is perfect. Yes, that Manny's. It's an old classic for a reason. Even if you've been together for ages or just want to people watch with friends, you're in good hands. Good meaty hands. Seriously, do I even need to make a case for the food at Manny's? No. You know it's amazing, so take my partner's advice and try the bar for Valentine's Day. In fact, he always recommends eating in the bar of your favorite restaurant. It's the perfect way to have a new experience at an old favorite.

Parlour Bar beneath Borough

For those who want to go full frontal casual date this Valentine's Day or are single and just looking to have a great night out with friends, run (I mean it, like you're Flo-Jo) to Parlour Bar in the basement of Borough along Washington Avenue in Minneapolis. If you haven't already heard, the burger at Parlour is life-changing. That is not an exaggeration. And





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Jonesing for Joan's corn cake with triple cream and green tomato jam; Pork belly with strawberry spinach and pork rind.
Photos courtesy of Joan's in the Park



I can't think of a better way to impress a potential partner or drown the sorrows of sad-sack singlehood than with this beloved two-pattied, cheese-smothered burger in the basement of one of the bes restaurants in town.

Voila! It couldn't be simpler than that. You now have four brand new, person-who-loves-to-eat tested restaurant ideas for Valentine's Day in the Twin Cities. Actually, added bonus, you now have four brand new ideas for regular, every other day of the year dining in the Twin Cities as well. From this moment on, you have absolutely no reason not to have a thoroughly memorable Valentine's Day, whether with or in spite of that special someone. ■



The bar at Manny's.
Photo courtesy of Manny's



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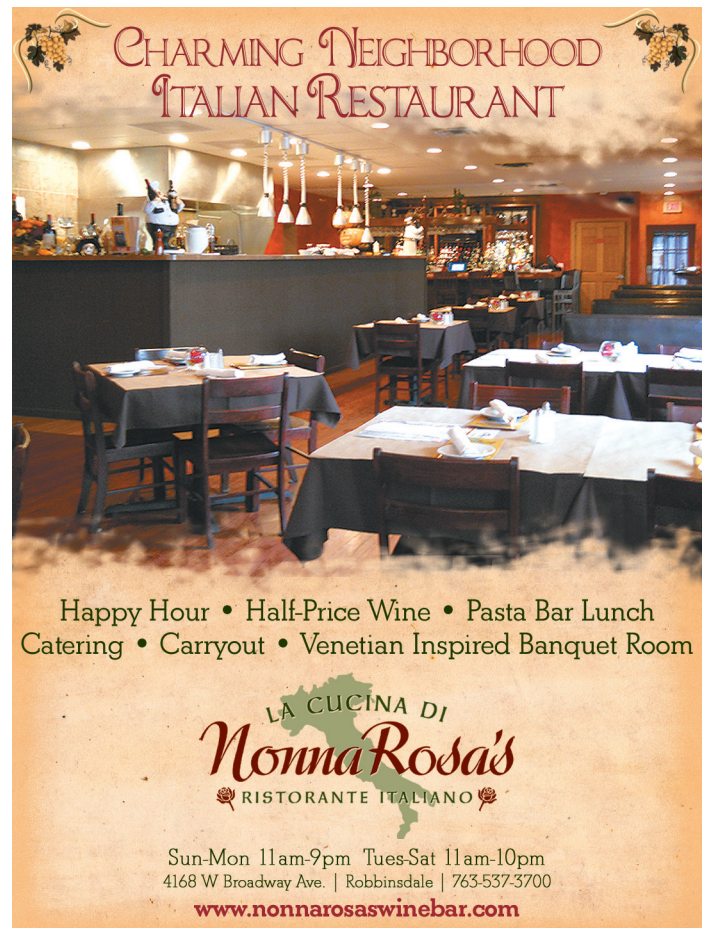
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BY MATTHEW LINK, PHOTOS COURTESY OF PALM SPRINGS BUREAU OF TOURISM

For nearly a century, lovers have been lured to this Southern Californian desert hot spot. It was 1922 when Hollywood's original heartthrob, bisexual silent screen stud Rudolf Valentino, honeymooned in Palm Springs with his equally bisexual bride. In more recent years, out pop star Lance Bass met his future husband here, and Ellen and Portia had designs for a big desert wedding at the plush Riviera resort before the paparazzi forced a change of plans.

Every other legendary couple of the last 100 years—from Elvis and Priscilla to Brad and Angelina—have retreated behind the sunny cloak of the desert for their intimate romantic getaways.

For go-go boys and party girls, Palm Springs is synonymous with the annual spring-break disco-decadence events White Party and The Dinah, the world's largest gay circuit party and lesbian event weekend, respectively. The desert town's gay and lesbian resorts



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number over 25, the largest collection in the nation and possibly the world. Nearly all are clothing-optional, helping to fuel Palm Springs' anything-goes reputation.

After moving here five years ago, this desert retreat of just 50,000 souls began to slowly reveal to me its greatest secret of all: Palm Springs is actually—dare I say it—*romantic*.

Several of the gay resorts are actually elegant and upscale. Some offer honeymoon and romance packages for gay couples complete with roses, champagne, and spa treatments (see sidebar).

Not only does Palm Springs enjoy one of the highest per capita GLBT populations in the nation (30 to 40 percent of the residents), the city's zip codes rank #2 and #4 in the nation for their percentage of male cohabiting couples, according to the U.S. Census. Heck, even Palm Springs' current mayor, Steve Pougnet, is married with a husband and two small children.

The cinematic setting (a couple hours' drive inland from Los Angeles or San Diego) creates a spectacularly inspirational backdrop for any wedding or honeymoon. The San Jacinto Mountains shoot up 10,000 feet directly from the back of downtown Palm Springs, and the world's largest rotating tramcar whisks you up to these peaks for snowball fights, sometimes even in summer.

Keep in mind, Palm Springs has over 350 days of sunshine and is in the 70s to 80s during the winter. Perfect for you to escape the chilly weather and head to the sunshine.

Less than an hour outside of Palm Springs' city limits lies the 800,000-acre Joshua Tree National Park, where the Mojave high desert (with its native Dr. Suess-like Joshua trees) and the Colorado low desert (with its native Sponge Bob-like ocotillo cacti) collide to form terrain that looks shipped in from another planet.

Delving into this environment is itself romantic, whether you and your honey choose on horseback, in a hot air balloon, or with a private open air gay jeep tour. Or simply gaze up at the pink sunset mountains while you both float naked in the pool at one of the GLBT resorts or your own private pool at vacation home and condo rentals.

Palm Springs offers the luxurious infrastructure of a much larger destination—but without the traffic, smog, and attitude. And the place is experiencing a hearty resurrection. Thirteen acres of the downtown village is undergoing a major (and gorgeous) multi-million dollar makeover. Hipsters and trendsetters have recently rediscovered Palm Springs thanks to the über-popularity of the nearby Coachella Music Festival, and artsy new clubs, lounges, and hotels are revitalizing the town's once-stale scene. And Hollywood is also finding Palm Springs again: Leonardo DiCaprio recently purchased a mid-century masterpiece home that once belonged to singer Dinah Shore (whom *The Dinah* is named after).

Instant relaxation seems to descend upon arriving passengers at the intimate and futuristic Palm Springs International Airport when they behold the towering scenery and breathe in the calm desert air. (New daily non-stop flights on Delta and Sun Country whisk you straight from Minneapolis-St. Paul to Palm Springs in wintertime).

Nothing within the town of Palm Springs is more than a 15-minute drive away, and newlyweds can let the champagne flow by



CONTINUED ON PAGE 43

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hopping on one of the city's brand-new free trolleys, which enjoy the party-friendly name BUZZ. Lily Tomlin and Carol Channing were at the recent launch of the trolleys, which service 30 stops at 15-minute intervals every Thursday through Sunday until 1 a.m. That gives one ample time to peruse the city's rich smorgasbord of gay clubs, restaurants, and shops.

"Palm Springs has a long history of welcoming gays and lesbians," explains Mayor Pougnet, "So I can't imagine any place more perfect to marry."

When California first legalized same-sex marriage for six short months in 2008, Palm Springs City Hall performed over 600 civil ceremonies for same-sex couples (with the gay mayor personally presiding over 115 of them).

Gay marriage finally became permanently legal in California in 2013, the same year the Palm Springs Bureau of Tourism launched their gay-welcoming web site, www.weddingsinpalmssprings.com, as a companion to their site www.visitgaypalmssprings.com.

Beginning last year, Palm Springs City Hall has set aside each Friday as Wedding Express due to the high demand for civil ceremonies and "to streamline the marriage process and make it easier and more convenient for all members of our community, gay or straight, looking to get married in Palm Springs," says Mayor Pougnet.

"We hope as a tourist destination that people come from states where it's too cold, even if (marriage there is) legal or not, and that we develop a tourist destination for weddings here," says Reverend Richard Cadieux, a gay wedding consultant who has performed over a thousand marriages at hundreds of venues in the Palm Springs area. Cadieux says that after same-sex marriage became legal in California in summer 2013, "my business went up 400 percent."

Cadieux's company, Joyful Weddings & Events, is just one of several GLBT wedding planners in Palm Springs specializing in the social and legal nuances of this new frontier of same-sex wed-

dings. By locally arranging everything before your arrival in the desert—from rehearsal dinner venues to marriage license forms to flower arrangements—these experts ensure a smooth and mel-low marriage/honeymoon experience.

Palm Springs embraces its gayness fully, and locales like downtown's world-class Palm Springs Art Museum and the 6,000-foot Palm Springs Aerial Tramway enthusiastically host same-sex weddings. The former desert homes of stars like Lucille Ball, Frank Sinatra, and Cher are all available as short-term rentals, making for a glamorous outdoor ceremony as well as a posh vacation home for you and/or your wedding posse. Many couples planning their destination wedding in Palm Springs often plan smaller ceremonies and host large parties poolside.

"We've done traditional weddings, small weddings, even a couple of naked weddings," says Michael Green, a local gay wedding officiant and owner of Palm Springs' clothing-optional men's resort Triangle Inn. "Most have been for [people] who have been together for ten or more years—California residents as well as couples from all over the United States and Canada. It's been a great way to contribute to our community."

Gregory Goodman, owner of downtown's My Little Flower Shop, unequivocally states that "Palm Springs is in a boom right now, of course. And I would say Palm Springs is one of the best wedding destinations."

Goodman and his husband Alan fell in love with the desert and turned their weekend home here into their full-time residence. Due to the exploding demand, their wedding planning services have grown from sideline business to the cause of their recent relocation and expansion. The couple now also oversee My Little Bridal Boutique.

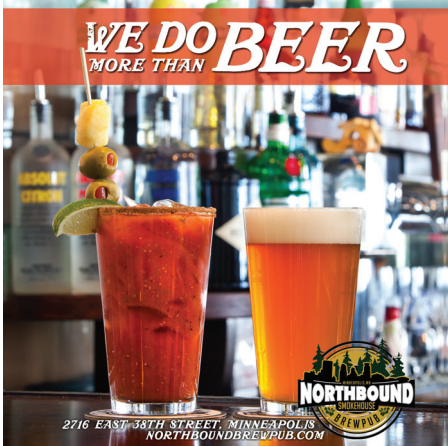
As for the reason why, Goodman's response is once again unequivocal. "Everyone wants to come to Palm Springs."



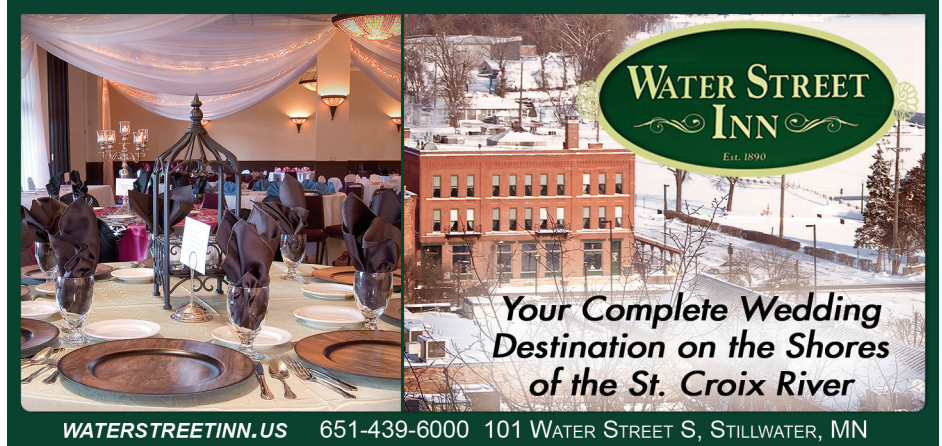
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VISITOR INFORMATION

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www.eastcanyonps.com

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www.thehacienda.com

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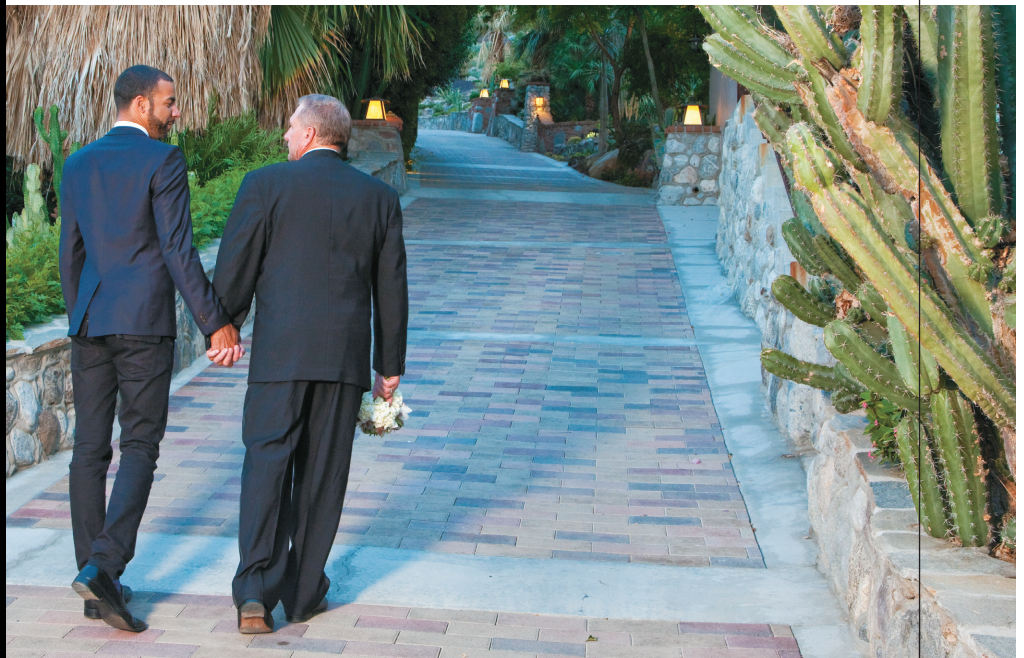
PALM SPRINGS WEDDING 101 CHEAT SHEET

Wedding Express service at Palm Springs City Hall:

- Every Friday from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Speedy marriage licenses and/or civil ceremonies
- Information: 760-863-7505, www.asrclrec.com/Clerk/MarriageLicensesCeremonies/CivilMarriageCeremony.aspx

Marriage licenses:

- Cost is \$90 at city hall (check or credit card only)
- Valid for 90 days
- Valid for any county in the State of California
- Recognized by federal government as full legal marriage even if your home state does not
- Valid government-issued photo I.D. required (passports acceptable)
- Both parties on license must be present together
- Both parties on license must be 18 years or older
- If one or both parties are under 18, a court order for the minor must be shown for license to be issued
- Copy of previous divorce or domestic partnership dissolution required within 90 days of license issuance
- Open to out-of-state residents and non-U.S. citizens
- Out-of-state residents must have notary-signed forms to obtain a certified copy of marriage license
- Non-U.S. citizens must have apostille-signed forms to obtain a certified copy of marriage license
- Blood tests not required
- Downloadable forms available at www.asrclrec.com/FormsFees/Forms.aspx



Civil Ceremonies:

- Every Friday at Palm Springs City Hall from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
- Costs \$75 (check or credit card only, paid in advance)
- By reservation only
- At least one witness required for ceremony
- Presided over by city official (non-religious)
- Marriage license is obtained separately
- Marriage is not legal until paperwork is filed correctly
- Downloadable forms available at www.asrclrec.com/FormsFees/Forms.aspx

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LUTSEN



A SUPERIOR WEDDING, A GREAT LAKE, A GOOD STORY

BY ANDY LIEN, PHOTOS BY DEREK MONTGOMERY & EMILY STEFFEN

I can imagine the last morning of life as a single person. I'm drinking a cup of coffee on a private balcony, both on a mountain and overlooking a mountain, a great blue lake is in the distance. I can't see across it. It's as expansive as my future with my beloved. I would be getting married on Moose Mountain on Lake Superior, in front of friends and family, surrounded by beauty, gazing at beauty, being a part of the beauty.



The Lutsen Mountains are along the North Shore of Lake Superior, north of Duluth but south of Canada. Not only is there our Great Lake that is just so enchanting, but our flat state seems to rise to meet it, with the tallest mountains in the Midwest. We come here regularly. We hike the trails, we've made breakfasts and lunches and elaborate dinners in these rental condos at Eagle Ridge Resort. We love live

music, we've seen some of our favorites on this mountain through the years. We've taken the Mountain Tram to the Summit Chalet and the sky has dumped fat snowflakes on us, obscuring our view of the surrounding mountains and trees. We've fallen on our asses and laughed them off. We love it here.



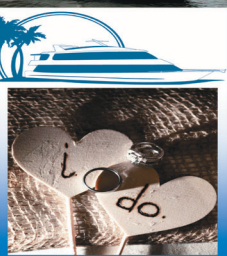
Even though we're so familiar with everything here, it still feels like a destination. It will always be a destination. And this is our destination wedding.

When the Lutsen area isn't the winter playpen for skiers and snowboarders, it's an idyll of wildflowers, trees, and waterfalls. Our guests will enjoy seeing the mountains on what is ironically an off-season, though it's gorgeous and lush, a spectacle of nature. Many of them will take advantage of the discounted package rates at Eagle Ridge Resort,


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Photo: lauren b. photography

some will camp, some will stay further away, on their own adventures. I hope they all get a good dose of the State Parks or art galleries or water views, whatever passes their fancies. Grand Marais is so close, as are so many parks and waterfalls, that it's hard not to jest about playing hooky from our own wedding. Even if they're just there for the day of the event, our guests will be treated to views from the Mountain Tram gondola ride to the top of Moose Mountain, ones that I am frankly quite surprised to see in Minnesota.

As we've been planning this grand event, we'll learn much about having a wedding on a mountain. When we wonder how we'll get our elders up the mountain, our guides at Summit Chalet ease our nerves by telling us a van can take our precious cargo up and down, rather than the Mountain Tram. Like our contacts at the Chalet, our vendors know the ropes as they've done many weddings here before ours; they know the mountain, they know the spaces, they know the views and how they fit into the setting. We'll import our photographer, some musicians, and decorations; the rest will come from the vendor list.

We tasted delicious menu items and went with the Sea Salt & Cracked Pepper Crusted Prime Rib and you'll laugh when I request an end because you know I like it well done. Our guests will also enjoy the Ginger and Maple Honey-Glazed Pork with Honeycrisp Apples because it'll match the season of our nuptials, autumn, when the air is getting crisp and the flavors are deepening. If the coin flip had fallen differently, our choice would have been the Swedish Meatballs. Just because. Our gluten-free and vegetarian friends will be thrilled with the options of salads and sides, we made sure to choose plenty for their palates. The kids have their picks, the bar will be stocked, and we know I'll be happy with unlimited Caribou Coffee, because I always am. It's all very *Minnesota*. It's all very *us*.

You had some very well-reasoned doubts. You know we're not spring chickens. You wondered if we should elope. We checked; we could. Our friends at Summit Chalet can work a little magic if we'd wanted a small ceremony at the top of some of the meadowland ski runs or a really intimate, barely noticeable foursome ceremony elsewhere on the grounds. It was a fleeting thought, and you know that we both wanted our love more publicly displayed. We wanted to shout our vows from the mountaintop. We want the world to hear, to see, to witness. Microphones, music, dance, celebration. We want at least a little pomp and circumstance. *Rustic* pomp and circumstance. And then we'll toast and dine and end the reception with a firepit on the deck, under the stars, on a mountain, within view of our lake in the dark.

The night before the wedding, we had the rehearsal dinner at Papa Charlie's, in a private dining area upstairs, away from some of the hubbub, but still within reach of it. A rehearsal dinner likes a little hubbub, particularly after the rehearsal, itself, up on the mountain. There might be some nerves to mitigate. Papa Charlie's had music, pool, darts, and plenty of food and drink to keep our bellies full. We needed to blow off some steam, and then we needed to wander back down the hill to our condos to get a good night of sleep; something that is easy to do on a quiet ski mountain in the summer. We'll be together again on our wedding night, but that night before, we sleep alone.

I hope someone brings you coffee as you sit on your balcony, separate from me, the morning of our wedding, because that's my job for the rest of my life with you. I hope you eat enough so the nerves don't get the best of you, we stocked your condo's fridge to stave off the hangries. I hope you don't worry about your vows because nothing you say to me will be wrong; it will be just right, just as we are. I hope that you take a morning hike and get to clear your head like you like to, because you're in the perfect place for it.

I can't wait to see you at the top of this mountain, in front of all of our loved ones, between me and the lake and sky. We'll walk toward each other, toward the ledge, toward our future: a great expanse. ■

Weddings at Summit Chalet at Lutsen Mountains:

- Mountaintop location with 100-mile view of mountains and Lake Superior
- Ceremony is outdoors, with indoor cocktail hour, reception dinner, and dance for up to 165 guests
- Price includes round-trip Mountain Tram gondola ride to the summit of Moose Mountain
- Food is prepared by Summit Chalet, other vendors are negotiable
- Group bookings at Eagle Ridge Resort at base of the mountain earn discount at Summit Chalet
- A Group Coordinator from Summit Chalet is included in the booking to assist in the details of your wedding on the mountain
- Papa Charlie's is available for rehearsal dinners as well as parties after your reception

For more information, go to www.eagleridgeatlutsen.com/experience/weddings.

Note: this is a fictional account, based upon multiple visits to the locale; the writer is not getting married, so please don't tell her mother.



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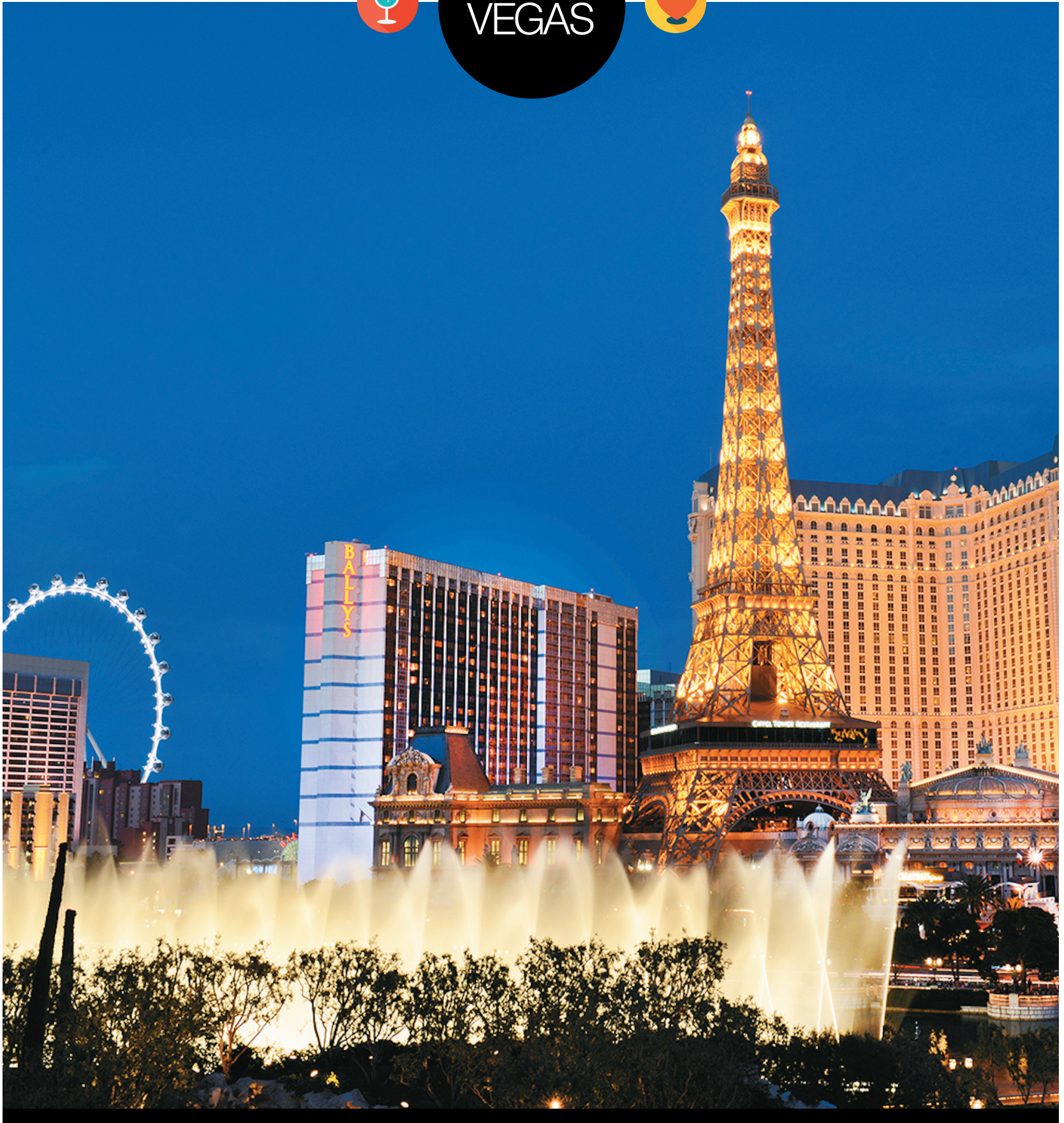


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BY JIM MCMICHAEL
PHOTOS BY LAS VEGAS NEWS BUREAU



“Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas.”

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But you also know it’s much more than a sign, or a slogan. It’s how you feel with every visit to Las Vegas, capsulized in one word.

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With open arms, you know you and your partner have always felt welcomed here. Every visit provides a chance for some intimacy and romance, where you and your special someone can express your love for each other openly and unconditionally.

But now, it’s time to take the next step. The biggest step you’ll ever take. You’re ready to share your love with the world and make the ultimate commitment by leaping into the bonds of matrimony. And Las Vegas is ready, too.

Have the Las Vegas marriage you deserve and celebrate your

CONTINUED ON PAGE 54 ➔



nuptials in the undisputed “Wedding Capital of the World.” You and your partner can officially tie the knot in any number of venues, in any number of ways.

But the ceremony is just the beginning. Before you tie the knot, you definitely need to let loose a little. No place can help you do that quite like Las Vegas.

What better place to have a bachelor or bachelorette party?

For bachelors, starting the evening with a show, like the outrageous and politically incorrect Absinthe at Caesars Palace, is a great way to kick off the party. Hosted by the zany Gazillionaire and his raucous assistant, Absinthe delivers raunchy comedy and old-world burlesque. Then, you’ll be ready for Thunder From Down Under at Excalibur and the perfectly sculpted male dancers with their mesmerizing accents, or Chippendales at the Rio All Suite-Hotel & Casino, the classic male revue show in a custom-built theater. Continue the party at Liaison Nightclub inside Bally’s Las Vegas, the first nightclub catering specifically to GLBT patrons inside a Las Vegas Strip resort. For more dancing, drinks and high-energy fun, slide over to The Bank inside Bellagio or Body English at Hard Rock Hotel & Casino.

Bachelorettes, grab your girls and enjoy a complete dining experience at Andrea’s inside Encore at Wynn Las Vegas, with a full menu of contemporary American favorites, desserts for any sweet tooth and, of course, signature cocktails. Then, head out for the late shows of Fantasy, X Burlesque or Crazy Girls and experience what makes Las Vegas an adult playground.

A little recuperation time at the spa may also be in order. Check out Canyon Ranch SpaClub at The Venetian Las Vegas for massage, skin care and body treatments. ESPA at Vdara Hotel & Spa celebrates the calming power of water with several signature treatments, and Drift Spa & Hammam at Palms Place at Palms Casino Resort features a traditional Turkish hammam. You can also enjoy live entertainment at Beauty Bar in the Fremont East Entertainment District. While downtown, be sure to pop by Commonwealth or Hogs & Heifers Saloon for some rowdy times with a round of shots or pitcher of beer.

And, when you’ve danced, lounged, and libationed yourself silly, there’s always shopping. The Fashion Show mall boasts seven anchor stores and 250 specialty stores and restaurants. Department

stores include Macy’s, Dillard’s, Saks Fifth Avenue, Nordstrom, Bloomingdales and Neiman Marcus. The Miracle Mile Shops at Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino includes H&M, GUESS by Marciano, and more.

When the big day comes, you’ll be ready. A wedding in Las Vegas is sure to leave lasting memories, so be sure to take your sweetheart on a gondola ride inside The Venetian Las Vegas, snap pics at the Bellagio fountains, or enjoy your first meal courtesy of Wolfgang Puck. The possibilities are endless.

Don’t forget the honeymoon! Las Vegas has everything you need, including the GLBT honeymoon package at Paris Las Vegas, where you can begin your married life while enjoying the breathtaking views from the Eiffel Tower observation deck.

Of course, it wouldn’t be a true Las Vegas experience without enjoying some of the signature dining options that have made this city a gourmet lover’s paradise. Las Vegas has the most comprehensive collection of celebrity chefs and world-class restaurants and master sommeliers than any other city in the world.

There are plenty of places to get cozy and share an intimate meal with your partner. Say it with a rose! Experience exquisite service in a casual setting at Hugo’s Cellar at the Four Queens Hotel & Casino, where every lady is presented with a red rose when they arrive. Show your special someone that you’re on Top of the World—and then eat there, too—at the restaurant more than 800 feet above the Strip at Stratosphere Casino, Hotel & Tower. See unparalleled views of Las Vegas as the restaurant revolves 360 degrees in one hour and 20 minutes.

For more inspiring views, dine at Alizé at the top of the Palms Casino Resort, overlooking the Las Vegas Strip while you enjoy world-class cuisine, or watch the magnificent Fountains of Bellagio while dining across the street at the charming French Bistro, Mon Ami Gabi inside Paris Las Vegas.

It’s all waiting for you in Las Vegas, where you can walk down the aisle confidently, celebrate joyfully, and where you and your spouse will always be welcome. ■

Jim McMichael is the Diversity & Cultural Marketing Manager of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority (LVCVA). For more information, go to www.lasvegas.com.

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Atlanta-based Burly Bakers burst onto the dessert scene in early 2013 with a simple motto at the heart of everything they do: "If you're gonna be bad, it better be good." And that's why out owner Bill Armstrong only uses the highest quality ingredients available to serve up their Southern-style brand of gourmet treats. Now their treats can be delivered nationwide, like the Sweetheart Sampler, just in time for Valentine's Day, which includes their four bestsellers: Blackberry Almond Shortbread Bars, Brown Butter Cashew Blondies, Fudge Brownies, and Lord Have Mercy Bars.



1

2. The Chocolate Cellar Wine

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3

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4



2

5. An AIDS Quilt Songbook: Sing for Hope

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iTunes

www.itunes.com

This new classical album is a wonderful new musical tribute to help find, and fund, a cure for HIV/AIDS. Sing for Hope is a New York City-based national nonprofit that helps artists give back to their community. This collection gathers the world's most renowned classical music stars (including: Yo-Yo Ma, Isabel Leonard, Joyce DiDonato as well as actress Sharon Stone and actor Ansel Elgort) to create this unprecedented album. Proceeds from the album support amFAR, funding critical HIV/AIDS cure-focused research.



5

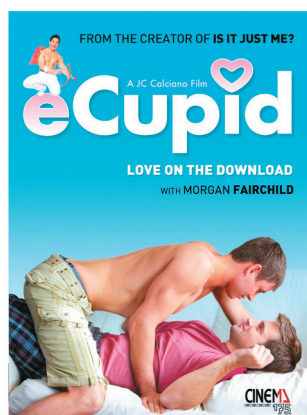
6. eCupid

\$24.99

Amazon

www.amazon.com

This film may not be new (came out in 2011 and was one of our Lavender Out at the Movies flicks), but as online dating becomes more and more popular, this story makes for an interesting movie night with a special someone. After seven years with his boyfriend, Gabe, Marshall's love life is stuck in a rut. He goes looking for something new online, where he comes upon a mysterious app that turns his life upside down.



6

7. What I Love About You

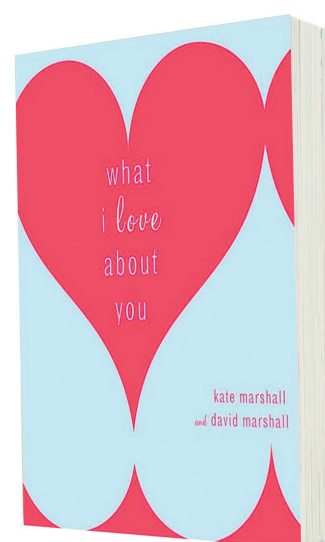
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Many gifts come and go, but this guided journal where one partner is prompted by questions and fill-in-the-blanks about the other is a memory that will last a lifetime. Playful and tender, this is the ideal gift for the person in your life who makes your pulse race. It's also GLBT-friendly, too, with gender-neutral questions. Prompts range from "If we'd first met in a comic strip..." to "One of your most irresistible physical features is..."



7

8. KeepCup

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8

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Duluth

www.lakesuperiorartglass.com

These hand-blown wine goblets feature gold leaf in each cup and are made in New York by artist Dan Mirer, an instructor at the Corning Museum of Glass. Each piece is hand-crafted using Venetian techniques with a contemporary feel.



9



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i like you is a true Minneapolis original, owned and operated by Sarah Sweet and Angela Lessman, accompanied by two employees, Jessica Smith and Danie Feld. i like you is a creative space for local crafters and artists to showcase their wares, collaborating with over 200 artists to create a shop with finds that are all locally or independently made. Merchandise changes as frequently as the artists' moods, so be sure to take something home if it suits your fancy, like these Valentine's creations now available. All cards are blank on the inside.

1. **For the softball or baseball player:**
 "So glad we're battin' for the same team."
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2. **For the drag queen, or anyone with a queen complex:**
 "Don't be a DRAG Just be a QUEEN"
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3. **For the lesbian or gay couple (or anyone willing to get creative with a marker and modify the symbols):**
 "Love Rules"
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4. **For the same-sex parents:**
 "Heck yes two dads are better than one"
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5. **For the GLBT friend with pride:**
 Rainbow chevron design with "bff" in a red heart
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6. **For the very special unicorn:**
 Felt and bead design featuring a unicorn
 \$5.50
7. **For the Boy/Girl Scout, super hero, or anyone else deserving a medal:**
 "I Love You" badge
 \$5.75
8. **For the trendy, sentimental special someone who loves vintage keys:**
 "You hold the key to my heart"
 \$5.50
9. **Looking for something more than a card?** These vintage plates are printed with a variety of sayings by a local artist and can be used as decor, serving trays, and more—you're only bound by your imagination!
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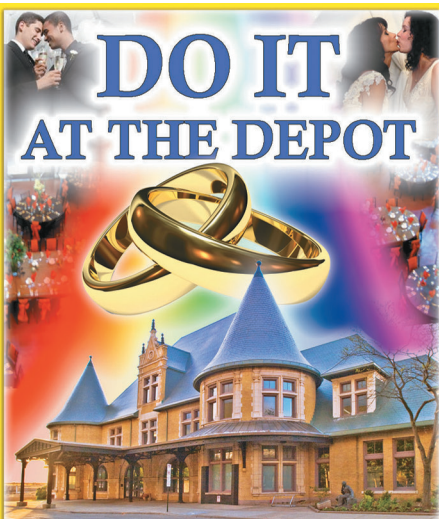


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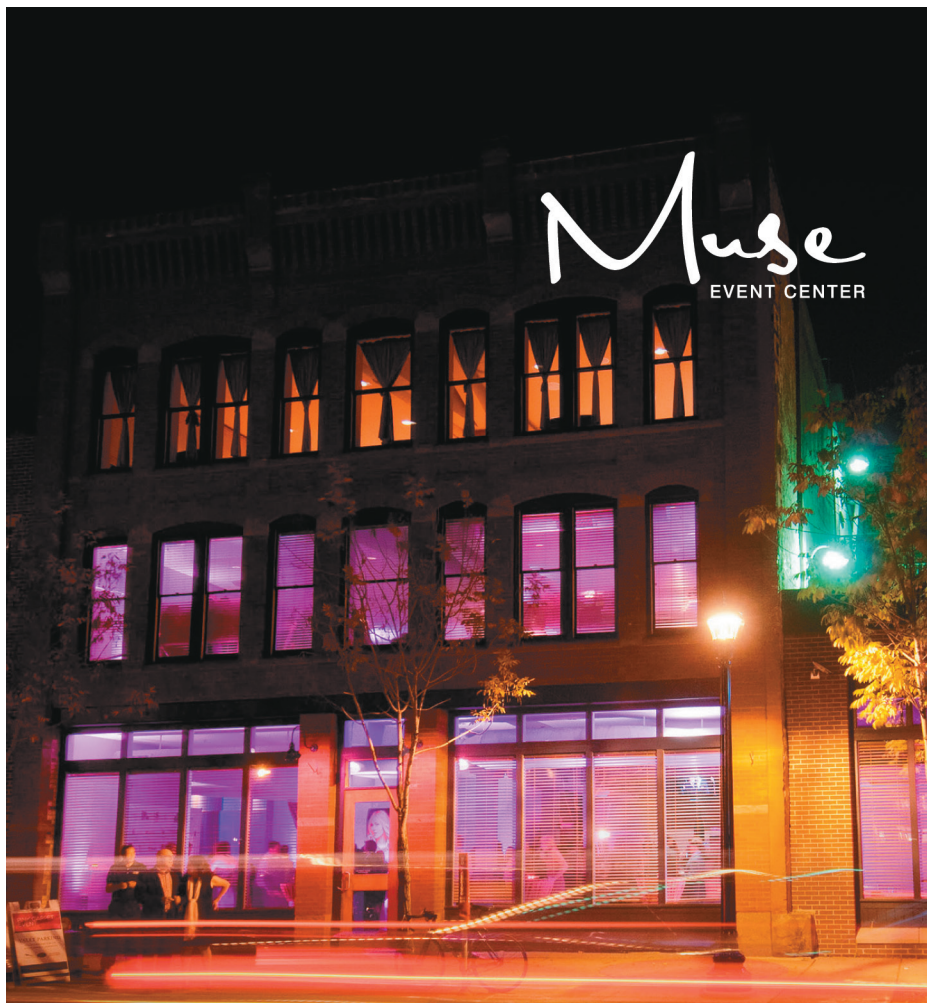
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Photo by Sophia Hantzes

One had given up on love and the other was ready to meet and greet.

One used to be a nun and the other wrote a book about it.

Both love the other.

J. Colleen Breen and Sandy Bloom were both single and had friends in common, despite having never met each other. In 1995, one of these friends approached each woman separately with the same idea: "I know

someone that I think you would enjoy meeting." The way every blind date nightmare begins.

"I initially said, 'No, I'm through with love,'" Bloom says, who had ended a 13-year relationship only a couple years before. "But after a couple weeks, I rethought it. I had Colleen's phone number and asked if she would like to meet and we've been meeting ever since."

Breen saw it differently.

Having been single for a while, she was ready to get back in the dating game, admitting that she was open to meeting from the get-go. "We did talk a lot and laughed, I remember," she says. "I think Sandy found me funny and that is always good."

After her initial hesitation, Bloom jumped in head first. "It had been a million years since I had dated and when I met her, I just thought, 'Oh, golly, this is

really fun,'" she admits. "And we talked—talking was the thing. We talked about books and that was the initial pull for me: here is someone I can talk to about books; so I was immediately attracted. We had our first real date after that get-together."

Aside from a love of books and laughter, the women shared a value system of giving back and working with people. Breen worked as a licensed clinical social worker, primarily doing therapy and education with adults, retiring three years ago from Fairview Behavioral Services. Bloom, on the other hand, has a background in nonprofit management. Having worked with the Girl Scouts and Red Cross, Bloom's last full-time position was as the executive director of the Cedar-Riverside People's Center. "We both spent our careers in helping people," Bloom says.

In fact, when they met, and for many years thereafter, the two women worked within about two blocks of one another, Fairview and the People's Center both residing on the University of Minnesota's West Bank. "I remember one night, I was in the middle of a board meeting standing in front of about 20 people," Bloom says, before taking a break to laugh. "I looked out the big window and there she sat in her car at the curb looking at me. It was very distracting."

The couple made a commitment in 1997, two years after meeting, without a grand proposal. In their true fashion, the couple laughs before explaining that there wasn't a pivotal moment on bended knee; they

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Senior Living

"just sort of slid into it." Bloom explains that they became exclusive, seeing more and more of each other, their love evolving, and it just became obvious that this was what they were wanting.

One factor that may have instigated their commitment was a roommate, oddly enough. Breen had a person sharing her house, renting a room, who, incidentally, had been her realtor when she bought the house. He had become a mutual friend but had decided to move back East. Seeing as he was vacating the house, the women thought it was a logical time to make it semi-official and move in Bloom's belongings.

Without missing a beat, Bloom jumps in to clarify: "We weren't like that old joke about lesbians. What do lesbians bring on their second date? A U-Haul." A statement to which both women fail to stifle laughter.

The two also grew closer through their love of their families and traveling, doing plenty of international travel together. "Those kinds of experiences have been important to us," Breen says. "So yeah, we did just slide into it."

With the passage of marriage equality in Minnesota, Breen, now 70 years old, and Bloom, 76, have no plans to take their relationship to the courthouse.

"We talked about it quite a bit," Bloom says proudly. "What we finally decided is: we are very glad that option is out there on the table and quite widely accepted. But, for us, we made our commitment to each other. We had a party with loved ones, exchanged rings, and that was it for us. That was all that we really needed. We didn't feel the need to make it legally official."

Twenty years later, their love for each other shines through, and anyone questioning what makes the relationship so strong need only hear one story: the kitchen remodel. Beginning in

January of 2014, the process began as the simple task of replacing an oven because the door had broken off. Cut to six months later and their entire kitchen has been redone.

"We said that if we could get through that and still be together, we can get through anything," Bloom says with a hint of nostalgia before adding, "That kind of thing is stressful, but one of the things I enjoy the most about [Colleen] is she makes me laugh. I think she's the funniest person I've ever known, and laughter goes a long way in making a relationship good. We laugh together a lot."

Bloom's statements are self-evident as the couple are barely able to make it through a few sentences before breaking out in laughter once again. Breen adds, "Being with Sandy is pretty much wonderful. It is so special to be with someone who gets you—that's a pretty big treat in life—and Sandy does that for me."

This is where Bloom jumps in, beaming. "Not that we're joined at the hips! In Khalil Gibran's book, *The Prophet*, he says, 'Let there be spaces in your togetherness' and I do believe in that. But we have so many things in common that that's very enriching in a relationship."

This kind of banter has drawn several young gay couples to approach them in public and admit their admiration, saying they'd like to be just like them, when they get older. "They bought us chocolate martinis!" Bloom exclaimed, with a smile. Or the young lesbian couple who tapped them on the shoulder at the Town House and declared, "We think you're the cutest couple on the dance floor," prompting more free drinks.

Clearly, they serve as a great example of what true love can look like. The secret to success? Bloom thinks it's about open communication, describing how she notices so many couples



Photo by Sophia Hantzes

sitting across from each other in restaurants and not saying a word to one another. For her and Breen, the dynamic is different; a lull in conversation is rare.

This tight bond helped Bloom realize one of her life-long goals. A closeted writer, Bloom had always dreamed of writing a novel but had no subject ideas. "I couldn't come up with the story I wanted to tell. Then, in the year of '97, after Colleen and I had been together for two years, it occurred to me that my story was right in front of my face."

That story being Breen's personal history. The first 17 years of Breen's adult life were spent as a nun in Iowa, before she decided to leave the convent ("A story that is best saved for another interview," Breen jokes).

"I was not Catholic and didn't know that much about the Catholic Church, so when we got together she was telling me all about what that life was like," Bloom says. "I was aghast at how harsh that life was, and I thought this was the story I want to tell."

Her novel, *Waiting to Believe*, published in 2013, took 14 years to finish and details what life is like in the convent ("because it's not how it's usually portrayed"). Disguised as a novel, it is rooted in Breen's story and follows her trajectory. The formula proved successful, as the novel was a finalist in the category of Literary Fiction for the Midwest

Book Awards last year and was recently chosen as the book of the month for KSTP-TV's "Twin Cities Live" Book Club.

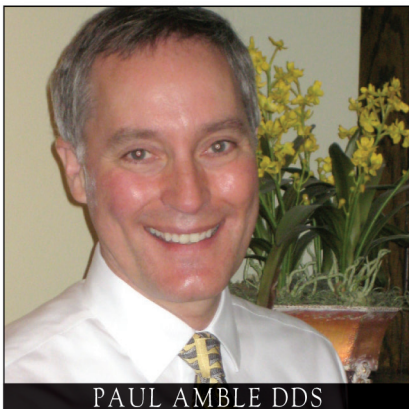
After documenting the past, the future looks bright. Their plan? To keep doing what they have been, because life is good. "I don't see many things I would change except maybe a few house repairs," Bloom jokes. "I don't think you fix something that isn't broken and I think we have a pretty good handle on what it is to live a good life."

Breen follows up with her own opinion on house repairs. "Sandy mentioned house repairs (and we do have glaring needs for house repairs), but I think long-term relationships are like maintaining a home. At times you really have to pay attention to things that might need help, might need tending. It happens to all of us; we need to come back together after an area of conflict or tension. Keep working on it, don't ever take it for granted, you have to keep working."

After a pause, Bloom adds with a smile, "We just continue to enjoy each other and appreciate every day knowing that it's a gift. It's like a favorite quote of mine by Robert Browning: 'Grow old with me. The best is yet to be.'"

Waiting to Believe is available at www.sandrakbloom.com

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TAKING CARE OF THE CAREGIVERS

Creating a multicultural, intergenerational, and cross-class LGBTQ Caregiver Support Group.

It's a new year! A new start! A new resolution! I am excited for what this new year brings. A year ago, I wouldn't have imagined being where I am today, doing what I love with a community that means so much. I've been working on the LGBTQ Caregiver Support Initiative for a year now, along with Wilder Foundation and many community members

across Minnesota who are or have been caregivers to their friends, partners, neighbors, and coworkers, biological and chosen families. It has been a heart-wrenching, eye-opening, and trail-blazing experience for me. I am sure many who are a part of this effort feel the same way.

Grassroots beginnings

The LGBTQ Caregiver Initia-

tive began in April of 2013, when the Wilder Foundation connected with a local LGBTQ caregiver through their online forum CaregivingNOW—a lesbian woman caring for her long-time partner who had Alzheimer's. She was interested in doing more to support and connect with other people caring for a partner, friend, or family member. Wilder was aware of the gap in

services for LGBTQ people who are caregiving for an older adult and had been looking for ways to help meet the need. While caregiving can occur for the entire age spectrum, the group began a conversation about how to create a space for LGBTQ caregivers of older adults. They determined early on that in order to meet the needs of the entire LGBTQ community they would



need to build a multicultural, intergenerational, cross-class space from the outset. As a community, we have not done the best in connecting across race, class, and generation. From a younger person's perspective, we miss out on important facts and historical knowledge from our elders that can inform our work in the movement. In the same way, when we don't intentionally connect with people outside of our race and class, we miss the opportunity to learn and understand different approaches to caregiving. We have to remember that there are many leaders that have come before us and there will be those that come after us. It's an important step to be mindful of as we create this space.

From there, the conversation grew from two people, to three, and continued to increase with each new person being asked to reach out to their friends and family in the LGBTQ community. In the spring of 2014, the group decided it was time to formally host a series of Community Design Sessions.

A coming out moment

At the first couple of community design sessions, a diverse group of caregivers and powerhouse organizers showed up ready to help build the foundation of a multicultural LGBTQ Caregiver Support Initiative. Over the next six months, we hosted eight design sessions, each time with new community leaders present, and new caregivers excited to find us. We also had one-on-one conversations with leaders from LGBTQ organizations, leaders from the faith communities and caregivers who were willing to share

their stories with us.

I'll always remember the first community design session that I attended. I felt like I had a coming out moment for myself. In that meeting, I realized that I had been a caregiver and just never knew it. Before that moment, I always thought of *caregivers* as meaning elderly people (as in the care-recipient), when in fact those have two different meanings. I never really knew what it meant. When I was caregiving, I just thought it was natural for me to assume that role because the people I was caregiving for were my friends, my girlfriend, my chosen family and at times, my biological family members. So I had a moment of coming out as a caregiver. As stated by Wilder's Caregiver Awareness Campaign: a caregiver is anyone actively taking care of an adult with a chronic illness or disability, or a frail elder. Family members and friends who provide care to a loved one often think of themselves as daughters, husbands, partners, and friends—not caregivers.

Breaking new ground

More than 65 million people in the United States are currently caregiving. Family members, friends, neighbors, and coworkers provide over 90% of long-term care in Minnesota. These caregivers are the backbone of our aging care system and, according to a **2012 Twin Cities LGBT Aging Needs Assessment Survey Report** by the PFund Foundation, LGBTQ people are twice as likely to be caregiving as the general public. The study also indicated that while in general, LGBTQ people simply want long-term care



services that are welcoming to our community; when it comes to support groups they want an LGBTQ-specific space.

We've spent the past nine months listening to stories from LGBTQ caregivers, as well as organizing and planning. We are so excited to announce that in February 2015, we will launch Minnesota's only LGBTQ Caregiver Support Group. In the support group, caregivers of older adults will be able to come together to share their feelings, thoughts, and the challenges they are facing in their caregiving journey in a safe, confidential, LGBTQ-specific space. The goal of the LGBTQ Caregiver Support Group is to provide emotional and social support and opportunities for learning to group members. We are using a co-facilitation model, with an intentionally cross-racial facilitation team. We are committed to creating a welcoming multicultural, cross-class, intergenerational LGBTQ-specific space.

We see launching the support group as our first step. Our small but committed group plans to host a series of Kitchen Table Conversations in 2015, engaging with all of you, our LGBTQ community, in more conversations about aging and caregiving. We plan on hosting dinners in different neighborhoods across the Twin Cities. In the future, the group also wants to address aging policy issues affecting LGBTQ people and to gather or create resources that could help those in the caregiving role.

Help us build this space

I've learned through being a part of this effort that, in caregiving, people are emotionally

drained. They are so invested in—and busy with—caregiving that what they really need and yearn for is someone to connect with, to have someone that can empathize with them, and to find a community where advice, experiences, and stories can be shared. They want to meet others who can relate to them and know that they are not alone in this journey of caregiving.

We had one person come from Wisconsin to share her LGBTQ caregiving story and to help us plan and organize. Today, she continues to call into our organizing meetings. I know there are others out there who are seeking a space like this, but are unaware that it exists. So, to start off the new year, my resolution for 2015 is to continue reaching out and building relationships so that we can continue to create much-needed spaces like the LGBTQ Caregiver Support Group. I hope that you will join us in building this space and I hope that you will share what you know about this opportunity with the people you know.

The LGBTQ Caregiver Support Group will launch in February 2015 with a Kick-Off Brunch on February 1st followed by monthly LGBTQ Caregiver Support Group meetings.

Register for the Kick-Off Brunch at: <https://lgbtqcaregiverbrunch.eventbrite.com>

We welcome your insights and experiences in creating the first LGBTQ Caregiver Support Group! Find us on Facebook (MN LGBTQ Caregiver's Group) or email me at yang@wilder.org to be added to our email list. There is so much work left to do. ■

AN INTERVIEW WITH REVOLUTIONARY AUTHOR ALEX MYERS

Alex Myers's Revolutionary ("Books," Lavender 492) is a historical novel based on Deborah Samson, a weaver in a small Massachusetts village, who, as Robert Shurtliff, assumed male attire and enlisted in the Continental Army in 1780. She fought with the troops for seventeen months in the latter months of the Revolutionary War until she was wounded in 1782 and honorably discharged in 1783. Lavender talked at some length with Myers, who knows from his own life journey the intricacies and importance of living one's gender.

Why did you choose to tell Deborah Samson's story?

Alex Myers: I am directly descended from Deborah Samson's brother through my mother's side of the family. My grandmother was an amateur genealogist and both she and my mother enjoyed telling stories about family members. Deborah was one ancestor of several who fought in the Revolutionary War. We used to go to visit my grandmother and watch the re-enactments of the battles of Lexington and Concord when I was little. That was usually an occasion for Deborah's story to be told, so it is a tale I knew deeply, one that I'd had almost my whole life to think about.

What did you find particularly compelling about Deborah's gender expressions? Rather than being compelled by inner, transgender urges, Deborah seemed to make a pragmatic choice to present as a man as her only way to a decent and productive life. I didn't get the impression that she would have used the pronoun "he" except while in her Robert persona.

AM: I think you have it correct: her choice was pragmatic. She wanted to be free, she wanted to make some money. The only way to do this was to be a man. Yet I also think that to maintain the disguise convincingly for a year and a half, she had to have, in some sense, become a man. I have to imagine that she was "comfortable" in that role—likely because of the independence that it gave—and in a way adopted that gender identity as her own. There was a surprising number of women who lived as men for varying lengths of time. For instance, Deborah would certainly have read stories/novels of Hannah Snell, who served as a British Marine aboard ship in the early to mid-1700s.

What things did you change from the actual historical events for the sake of the shape of the novel? Why?

AM: I made up all the minor characters except Jenny, who was real, though in real life was a free black servant. I kept the events that could be traced (the times and places of enlistment, action, and service) accurate, but the psychology and emotions are all fictional. For instance, Deborah reported that she nursed a soldier in the attic of a private house for a time and that they were betrayed and attacked by the British. I kept the sense of that event, but expanded it into a love story with [the soldier] James.

I did change one historical fact in Philadelphia: I had her hit on the head and end up in the hospital when in reality, she caught a fever. And at the end, I have her return home to Jenny while in reality she went home to an aunt. Mostly, I changed things to simplify or heighten the drama or to explore more of Deborah's character. Oh, I also changed the facts about New Windsor. She did serve General Patterson as I wrote, but she lived in the huts with the men, not in her own quarters. I changed that for two reasons: first, I wanted to mark her as different than before. Also, I could not figure out how on earth she passed in those huts!

I read a few criticisms of your slipping back and forth on personal pronouns, but I personally found your pronoun evolution effective, changing or kicking in at apropos moments. I think also, when one is in the process of transitioning, pronouns aren't always written in stone even in one's own head. Would you comment on your pronoun use?

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Alex Myers, present day.



(From left) Alex Myers: age four, age six, and age sixteen.



AM: I think you've nailed it. When I came out (and when others have come out to me) the pronouns go back and forth a bit. For many reasons. In the novel, I tried to peg it to moments when she might feel like a man and then moments when she remembers something from the past that makes her feel female. Pronouns are such a strong and public marker of self and identity; I couldn't resist playing with them!

What in *Revolutionary* do you find has most resonated with readers? Deborah's courage? The gender issues? History?

AM: Deborah's strength. As with much historical fiction, the truth of it resonates with readers. They have commented that they just didn't know life [then] was like that. They can't imagine taking the risks that Deborah did.

What would you like *Lavender* readers to know about *Revolutionary*?

AM: I set out thinking it would be a novel that would shed some light on the fact that transgender isn't a recent invention: people have been living as the "other" gender for a while and for a variety of reasons. But as I wrote and re-wrote, it turned out to be much more than that. I ended up wanting to write just about gender: forget the trans. How has "being a man" or "being a woman" changed over time? And then, how does that affect our understanding of trans identity now? What shifts those gender categories that we tend to think are so essential and fixed? Those were questions that I wanted to hint at and explore—and still want to write more on!

People are just opening up to the concept of transgenderism, and I think—hope—are becoming more open to learning more about us. When did you first realize your true self?

AM: I felt from as early as I can remember that I was a boy. I can recall telling people that when I was four or so.

At what age did you have the actual vocabulary to express yourself? "Transgender" wasn't a even word until I was about 13.

AM: I hadn't heard the word until I went off to Phillips Exeter Academy. I think it first crossed my path around '93. Before then, I had heard "transsexual" and "transvestite," and I had mostly heard those applied to MTFs [male-to-female], not that I knew that term, and so didn't think of myself in those terms at all. In '93, I came out as a lesbian to my friends, and it wasn't until '95, when I met transgender people and FTMs for the first time, that I came out as transgender. I had to see it to understand what it meant, and as soon as I saw, I knew: that's me.

How did your family and friends react? You and your parents must have digested the fact and worked together if you transitioned as a minor. When did they know?

AM: It took a lot of explaining. Most of my friends were great. My parents were initially confused and scared, I think, but within a couple of years, they came around fully and have been tremendously supportive. It just takes time and patience. As a teenager, I was lacking in patience, which didn't make the process any easier. I never came out to them as a

lesbian, though I think they suspected, and "transgender" wasn't a term they knew.

You first attended Phillips Exeter Academy as a girl, then graduated with a male gender expression. How were you received by the faculty and your fellow students?

AM: Exeter was tremendously supportive. I go back to visit and speak to the health/sex ed. classes almost every year, and I think that's a testament to how important this issue is to them. The school has had a number of out trans students since my time. The faculty was mostly great. One or two were not, same with the students. But the supporters overwhelmed the non-supporters. I look back at that now and think, *Wow! I can't believe I didn't wait until college to come out.* But then I remember how much I wanted to be myself, to feel free and empowered and true. And so I showed up for senior year as a guy. I think I channeled some of that feeling into Deborah!

When did you graduate Harvard? Was your gender a particular issue as an undergraduate?

AM: Only when I made it one. I graduated in 2000 and I was an activist for much of my college time; working to get gender identity included in the non-discrimination clause, doing lots of protests and rallies on behalf of transgender crime victims, etc. It is too easy to be silent, to live normally and let people forget—or not know—who you are; I felt it was important to speak up because I was in a privileged and safe space. Still am.

What has been the most trying aspect of being trans? Or have there been any problems? It seems that if one is taken at face value, problems don't arise.

AM: I think the "problem" for me is finding the right balance between being "in" and being "out." It would be very easy for me just to pass as a guy and live my life in a seemingly straight marriage, etc. But at the times when I've tried to do that, it hasn't felt right. I like masculine pronouns, I like to look like a guy. But, at heart, I am transgender. I identify with the having been/being both. That's how I see the world. So, the challenge is coming out to people who know me as a guy and telling them, "I don't want you to change your pronouns, etc., but I do want you to know that I am transgender." Sometimes, people wonder why am I telling them this? Why not just keep quiet? But assimilation isn't the answer for me.

Did you encounter other trans students at college or grad school? Do you know other trans individuals now? If you do, have you found that transwomen have a more difficult time vis-à-vis the public than transmen?

AM: Yes, I have known other transfolk starting in high school, though they weren't students at the same high school, and have had transfolk among my friends and acquaintances ever since. I think that MTFs have more "visibility" in the media and that is both positive and negative. There is no FTM equivalent for some of the early drag queens that were, though sometimes comic, very positive figures and empowering

for MTF identity. The flip side of that is MTFs tend to be the victims of crime more often and there are many complicated reasons for that.

Have you ever faced resistance from gays or lesbians? Some trans people have reported problems with others on the GLBT spectrum. (Do you say GLBT or GLBTQ?)

AM: Yeah. We don't really belong there, in some sense. Gender identity is not sexual orientation. Sexual orientation depends on gender identity. To be a lesbian, first you have to be a woman. For me, identifying as trans, there is no sexual orientation that fits. I call myself queer, and therefore GLBTQ is my [preferred] term. I strongly identify with the GLBTQ community and want to be a part of it; I just find myself misread or misunderstood some of the time.

Do you find, having seen things from both sides as it were, that you feel you have a better insight into Deborah's motives for the choices she made? I know, for a certainty, that people take me more at face value and listen to me more attentively as a man.

AM: I absolutely agree with your observations. When I interrupt someone in a business or academic setting, it is tolerated much more because I am a guy. And so on. Yes, I do think that having been/being both gave me insight into Deborah's character—but limited insight because her times and circumstances were so different! I had to let her be her own character in her own context.

Have you been rebuked or criticized for having transitioned? What do your critics say? What do you answer? Does direction matter? I personally think that men really get upset about someone "giving up" manhood for womanhood.

AM: Yes, I think your assessment is right: the direction we go in as FTMs is much more "logical" in that we gain status. Sure, I've had people critique me and my identity. Some of it has come from a reli-

gious perspective (I'm a sinner, I'm wrong) some from a social context (I'm a freak) and some from strange angles. Lots of people have made comments that in any other era I'd "just" be a butch lesbian. Others question why I don't get surgery (no plans to) and "really" be a man. I think people are uncomfortable with the liminality, with the in-between-ness. Like homosexuality [was], trans identity has long been categorized as an illness/sin and it will take society a while, if ever, to change that categorization.

What else would you like to say to *Lavender* readers about transgenderism?

AM: I think that it is crucial to remember that every trans person is different and defines themselves differently—this is part of what makes us annoying! So, even if you've met ten transpeople, the eleventh might have a very different take on gender expression. For me, I welcome the chance to have conversations about this and to sometimes politely and permanently disagree with how someone else defines gender or sex. I would encourage members of the GLBTQ community to look for ways that they can foster conversation about trans-identity; to set up meetings and forums and speakers where this issue can be raised and questions can be asked and things can be aired.

What are you doing now? Your plans for the future?

AM: I am earning an MA in English at Georgetown, where I work as an associate in the Lannan Center for Poetics and Social Practices. I also work at American University, where I am the assistant director of the Kogod Center for Business Communications, teaching graduate and undergraduate business writing, public speaking, and team presentations. For writing, I am working on a contemporary novel, also with a transgender character, which I think is best described as a "coming of gender" (à la coming of age) story. Whenever I need a break from the longer work, I turn to writing essays and short stories on a variety of themes. ■



Leather Families Feuding

All in fun, for charity.

Six Minnesota leather families (clubs, groups, organizations or just groups of five individuals) competed in the first Leather Families Feuding for Charity tournament on Saturday afternoon, November 22, at the EagleBOLT Bar in Minneapolis. The event was a triple fundraiser. Each family's registration fee went into a pool that benefited two charities chosen by the first- and second-place winning families. In addition, audience members' \$5 cover charge benefited Minnesota Leather Pride, providing funding for future events like the upcoming Minnesota Leather Sir/boy and Ms. Minnesota Leather Pride contests.

The six teams, of five players each, were: Atons of Minneapolis; Knights of Leather, playing for Avenues for Homeless Youth; MAsTers (Masters And slaves Together); The Ladies of the Lakes, an order of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence; Impawsters (a team of puppies and handlers); and FORE!, playing for the National Coalition for Sexual Freedom.

The tournament was the brainchild of host/emcee David Coral aka Jazz Thomas, who since childhood has loved television game shows and often fantasized about being a game-show host. When he mentioned his idea for a "Leather Families Feuding" fundraiser to the board of Minnesota Leather Pride, they decided to sponsor the event—and he had a chance to make his fantasy come true.

As host/emcee David Coral (center) reads a question, Andrew Bertke (left) of the Atons of Minneapolis faces off at the buzzer with Randy Ingram-Lile (right) of Impawsters. Photo courtesy of Andrew Bertke.

In addition to Coral, other community members involved in putting together the fundraiser included Vicki Knight and Tim Hotchkin. Ryan Brown provided technical and public-relations assistance and Bobbie Smith provided set construction.

The tournament was based on teams choosing the most popular responses to questions asked of large numbers of people. That meant questions had to be written (by Coral/Thomas and Hotchkin); surveys then were conducted at leather- and GLBT- community events throughout 2014, including every GLBT Pride event in Minnesota, to find the most popular responses to those questions.

Sample questions included "Name something hard" (a popular answer was "Math"); "Name something you would find in a dungeon"; and "Name something you would do before going on a long trip." Answers to these questions and many others were tallied to determine the most popular answers given, and the distribution of questions



As host/emcee David Coral (center) reads a question, Andrew Bertke (left) of the Atons of Minneapolis faces off at the buzzer with Randy Ingram-Lile (right) of Impawsters. The Impawsters, the first-place leather family in the Leather Families Feuding for Charity tournament.

throughout the tournament was statistically balanced to ensure the highest possible degree of fairness and impartiality. Finally, computer screens or "boards" were prepared that would reveal the most popular responses to the questions if players guessed them during tournament play.

Each tournament round started with one member of each family racing to be the first to "buzz in" on the question once it had been announced. If the player who was fastest with the buzzer was able to name the most popular response to the question, their family then was able to offer what they hoped would be other popular responses, earning points for each popular response they were able to name. However, if a family gave too many responses that were not among the most popular on the survey, the question passed to the opposing family. That family then had the opportunity to steal the first family's accumulated points, and earn more points as well, by offering responses that were popular on the survey. A round ended after each family member had been given a turn at the buzzer. At that point, the family with the largest number of points won the round.

Tournament play started with three rounds of two families each. The winners of those three rounds, along with a fourth family cho-

sen by a "wild card," advanced to the two semifinal rounds, and the winners of the semifinals advanced to the final round.

Throughout the afternoon, game play was intense, exciting, and full of sudden surprises and competitive turnarounds. The excitement among the audience of about fifty spectators (plus members of families who were not currently competing) made the atmosphere akin to a sports stadium. Emcee Coral's favorite response of the afternoon was to the question, "Name something you crave after a night in bed." The response? "A ride home."

The Impawsters, the first-place leather family in the Leather Families Feuding for Charity tournament. Photo by Andrew Bertke.

At the end of the final round the winning family was Impawsters, who earned a \$700 donation for Rainbow Health Initiative. The Atons of Minneapolis' second-place finish earned \$200 for The Aliveness Project. In addition, over \$250 in audience admission charges went to Minnesota Leather Pride.

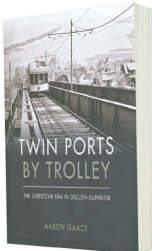
If you missed Leather Families Feuding for Charity, take heart—Minnesota Leather Pride was so pleased with the event that they promise it will happen again. Stay tuned. ■

OUR AFFAIRS

BOOKS | BY E.B. BOATNER

Twin Ports by Trolley: The Streetcar Era in Duluth-Superior

Aaron Isaacs
University of Minnesota Press
\$39.95



A marvelous addition to Duluth-Superior history, *Twin Ports by Trolley* traces the development and workings of the cities' transit system from its first horse-drawn cars to electric trolleys, exploring the politics, weather, and the rail men (and later, women) as it served through the years between the 1880s through 1939. Chock full of marvelous photographs—especially vivid are ones of the Incline, a counterweight track that ran from the harbor straight up to the top of the surrounding hill. Isaacs, who worked for Metro Transit for thirty-three years, is also co-author of *Twin Cities by Trolley* and through his engaging text shares his deep knowledge and affection for both the mechanical and human sides of his subject. There are maps and a glossary as well.

Marie Antoinette's Head: The Royal Hairdresser, The Queen, and The Revolution

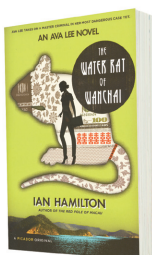
Will Bashor
Lyon's Press
\$26.95



In 1746, Léonard Alexis Autié was born in the provincial town of Pamiers in Gascony. By 1772, he had made his way to Paris—and beyond—becoming the royal hairdresser to the dauphine and future queen of France, Marie Antoinette. Léonard's flair for the fantastical and social acuity led to those phantasmagorical hairdos, the invention of the pouf and the four-foot constructions for her Majesty's pleasure that swept tout Paris, encumbering wives and bankrupting husbands. A delicious and meticulously researched perspective on the man and a society tipped irrevocably on the brink of ruin. A heady read, indeed.

The Water Rat of Wanchai

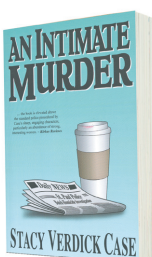
Ian Hamilton
Picador
\$16



Ava Lee doesn't take shit. From anyone. She's Chinese, speaks Mandarin and Cantonese. Her profession, "forensic accountant," a bit like Travis McGee, in that she recoups things that have gone missing; specifically, money. She works for a shadowy businessman that she is entitled, unlike most, to call "Uncle." That said, the reader need only sit back and let Ava Lee take the reins, as she shuttles from Seattle to Hong Kong to the British Virgin Islands pursuing a missing five million. There's some violence, but it's almost incidental to the promise of danger that infuses each crackling page. *Water Rat* is fourth in Hamilton's Ava Lee series that includes *The Disciple of Las Vegas*, *The Wild Beasts of Wuhan*, and *The Red Pole of Macau*.

An Intimate Murder

Stacy Verdick Case
Before the Fall
\$14.95



Local author Case brings back St. Paul homicide detective Catherine O'Brien and her partner, Louise Montgomery to solve a third Twin Cities homicide. Or, in this instance, double homicide. Jonathan and Susan Luther, a middle-aged couple, are found murdered in their home. By son Chad, who in Catherine's opinion is the killer. "Chad killed his parents. Case closed." When Louise asks how she knows, Catherine responds, "Instinct. Pure instinct." But is she right? Wise-cracking, caffeine-fuelled, ever lusting after her own husband, Catherine needs the balance of the more down to earth Louise to navigate this complex case. As she herself says, "I am the anti-Louise." A bright engaging read as the pair unravel the complex web of revenge and greed and sort it all out. ■

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2015 Volkswagen Passat



It used to be that if you built a car with a diesel engine with the intent of giving everyone space, it would have to be big. Big, as in a Mercedes-Benz 300SD Turbodiesel, that would only translate into one big point of reference: price. You could always pay less, such as for an Oldsmobile Ninety-Eight; however, the diesel engine installed in the downsized General Motors B/C-Bodies were reconstituted versions of gasoline motors. They were extremely unreliable.

Since then, diesel engine technology has changed. The turbochargers are now inter-cooled and more reliable than ever. Exhaust systems now emit lower emissions, thanks to “clean diesel” technology which includes using Urea fluid to cleanse the fluorocarbons before they escape the tailpipe.

It is appropriate that the latest Volkswagen Passat is put to the test. Though it competes in a hot market segment alongside other mid-sized family sedans, one would swear that it

would compete with larger sedans due to its spacious cabin.

Yet, there is one particular feature on this Passat that would be interest to you: its TDI turbocharged diesel engine. This opens up many questions to consider. How to approach them is going to be tough. Should we consider the Passat alone by its merits? What about its diesel power? Or, can we simply take this car as a complete entity?

How about “all of the above?”

The Passat's design has been a point of contention among brand enthusiasts. Some would have liked to have the current generation global Passat in its place, but Volkswagen had a plan. To regain the North American market, it had to be... well..."American." This is a familiar tactic used by General Motors. What used to be an Opel Vectra became the Saturn L-Series. By doing so, they fleshed out the platform to accommodate American bodies and tune their suspensions for American roads. VW did exactly that to this Passat; took the global platform, stretched it, and made it simpler for American eyes to digest, though retaining familiar VW design tenets.

The result is a familiar Volkswagen that is purely big-boned. Though there are some familiar lines, creases, and other design elements that point to the VW badge up front, the Passat does not elicit a level of excitement that engages brand enthusiasts. It is rather plain, but very functional. Wide opening doors and a huge trunk lid are two things you rarely find on other Volkswagens. If you had no history with the brand, and want to be anonymous, the Passat works in that fashion.

Step inside to a very spacious cabin. Front seat occupants have plenty of space to stretch out, unless you are tall and have the moonroof above you. Finding a suitable position behind the wheel will take some time, but you will find a competent place to operate the big Passat. Seats are on the small side, which is perfect for averaged-sized drivers. Rear seat passengers benefit from a comfortable bench and loads of rear seat room. One might argue that the rear seat is more comfortable than a Toyota Camry, the one car the Passat has ambitions to compete against.

Given the design leap on the current Golf and GTI, one would be disappointed by an older dashboard design and older switchgear on the Passat. However, it works very well. It is to the advantage of Volkswagen owners to use familiar stalks for the wipers, cruise control, and switches for the lights, climate control, and so forth. There are some logic issues regarding the infotainment system, though. When starting up, there is a lag in Bluetooth connection

and initial phone pairing is not as clean and easy as it should be. The steering wheel seems too thin for being a VW. Yet, instrumentation is familiar and logical to work with.

If there are two positive points to the Passat's cabin, it would be the Fender audio system and the gear selector for the DSG transmission. Fender's nine speakers emit amazing tones throughout the cabin, aided by a subwoofer that layers in the bass perfectly. Also, the short throw of the DSG lever is something for the enthusiasts to enjoy. It makes you wish for a manual lever instead.

The DSG transmission is also well matched for the TDI diesel engine under the hood. This is actually the new 2.0liter version of the turbocharged diesel engine that has been the most desirable power source for Volkswagen. While it only has 150 horsepower on tap, it will be the 236 pound-feet of torque that will win you over. When you step on the accelerator, it pulls away just like a V6. Plus, it is quiet and clean. That old diesel clanging no longer exists, while exhaust emissions have been cut to meet a 50-state standard. Power goes to the front wheels through one of the better transmission choices on any VW, the DSG. It is a solid gearbox; however, it would actually be more fun if it had either a Sport mode and/or paddle shifters. Only a few mid-sized family sedans would say that it had a dual clutch transmission with true manual operation.

Recent Volkswagen are known for having a sporting feel. The Passat was designed to offer comfort for passengers above all else. This is cause for debate pitting enthusiasts against family sedan consumers. The driving experience of the Passat tells the tale of comfort above all, considering how smooth and supple the big VW rode. Not that it is a bad thing, but that depends on which kind of consumer you are. Clearly, enthusiasts will be put off by the supple roll and lean in the curves and the light steering system. There is an ample turning radius, but the light steering action actually will respond quite quickly, despite being a bit disconnected.

Braking is very good. Stops are sharp and exact in normal and panic situations. This leads

to the traction control system, something of a hit-and-miss with Volkswagen products. On the Passat, it works quite well to provide necessary traction to the right wheels. I would love to see VW provide a suite of active safety features and possibly its 4Motion all-wheel drive system on its top trim of the Passat, if not all models.

When you drive a diesel, you expect high fuel economy and a long range on ultra-low sulfur fuel. The Passat TDI averaged 42.5MPG even in cold temperatures that would challenge fuel weight. There is no question that you will find the TDI-powered Passat a great alternative against gasoline models.

The big Passat starts off with a basic S model with the 1.8liter TSI turbocharged engine and starts at \$22,120. My TDI-powered SEL top range example came to \$34,405. As high-end mid-sized family sedans reach further into premium sports compact sedan pricing territory, one could argue that the diesel engine alone is worth the price of admission. However, you can still get the same TDI driveline in the less expensive SE trim, starting at \$26,825.

The Volkswagen Passat represents the modern diesel big sedan. It also represents the only diesel fueled option among family mid-sized sedans. It all seems to come together as we find alternatives to the good ol' gasoline fueled internal combustion engine. We could argue between hybrid drivelines, plug-in electric propulsion, or diesel fuel, but it just seems fair and logical that diesel offers a longer fuel range, despite the higher price fueling up per pump.

As for the Passat competing in a highly competitive and crowded field, Volkswagen brings a lot to the table. It has the cabin space and smooth ride to satisfy a lot of families and businessfolk. What it needs is more refinement to excel in this field. Perhaps in a mid-cycle refresh we could see some improvements in the Passat, starting with the infotainment system and the switchgear.

It takes a good sedan to bring in the customers. The Passat has some of that equation down. The dealmaker has to be the TDI diesel. That alone should win family sedan consumers over. ■





BIGGAYNEWS FROM FLORIDA:

Gay Marriage Ban Ends As Couples Wed Throughout Florida

ABC News reports that Florida's ban on same-sex marriage ended statewide at the stroke of midnight Monday, January 5th, and court clerks in some counties wasted no time, issuing marriage licenses and performing weddings for same-sex couples in the early morning hours. With the end to this ban, Florida joins 35 other states that recognize legal same-sex marriage, effectively putting 70% of Americans in states where gay and lesbian couples can wed. Although Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi is not threatening an appeal to this particular decision, she is still pursuing appeals that went to the courts previously.

BIGGAYNEWS FROM OHIO:

Transgender Teen Leelah Alcorn: "My Death Needs To Mean Something"

The *Boston Globe* reports that early on the morning of Sunday, December 28th, 17-year-old Leelah Alcorn died after being hit by a tractor-trailer while walking along a stretch of Interstate 71 near her Ohio hometown. Alcorn's death, ruled a suicide, has resonated with many after her posthumous suicide note explained how she had come out to her parents as transgender, had been forced into conversion therapy, and had been cut off from friends and supporters by her family, all of which ended up leading her to feel as though she'd reached a breaking point. At the end of her note, Alcorn makes a poignant plea, saying that "gender needs to be taught about in schools, the earlier the better. My death needs to mean something....fix society. Please."

BIGGAYNEWS FROM HOLLYWOOD:

New My Husband's Not Gay Show Causes Uproar

USA Today reports that TLC, the channel that brought us "The Duggars", *The Little Couple*, and *Sister Wives*, prides itself on showcasing how people live, offering a look into a world we may not often see. The channel's newest offering, *My Husband's Not Gay*, is a one hour special showcasing four men who are Mormon and married to women, but who find themselves attracted to men sexually. The four couples talk about how they deal with this within their

marriages. Many GLBT groups have decried the special, saying that it gives the idea that homosexuality is a choice, and that gay people can and should "choose to be straight" so that they can assimilate into their faith communities, something that can be very detrimental to their mental and physical well-being.

BIGGAYNEWS FROM THE UNITED STATES:

Gay Banner Removed From Pride DVD Cover In U.S.

The *BBC* reports that CBS Films has said it will look into why references to homosexuality were removed from the DVD cover of the US release of the British film *Pride*. The critically-acclaimed film, released last year, is based on the true story of gay and lesbian activists from London who supported striking Welsh miners in the 1980s, thus bringing together two very different cultures in a concerted effort that changed minds and opinions in both groups about each other. The director of the BFI film fund that backed the movie, Ben Roberts, stated that he is "not surprised that the U.S. distributors have taken a decision to sell more copies by watering down the gay content. I'm not defending it, it's wrong and outmoded, but I'm not surprised."

BIGGAYNEWS FROM SCOTLAND:

Church Of Scotland Votes For Gay Ministers

GayStarNews reports that the majority of Church of Scotland presbyteries have backed the appointment of gay ministers. Although the final decision will not be made until May at the Edinburgh General Assembly, the initial voting split was 55% in favor with 45% against the allowing of ministers and deacons in civil partnerships to be allowed to apply for vacant positions. The presbyteries of Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, and Stirling were among those backing the proposal, while Inverness, Falkirk, and Kirkcaldy were in opposition.

BIGGAYNEWS FROM INDIA:

First Transgender Mayor Elected In India

Advocate.com reports that for the first time in history, a city in India has elected a transgender mayor. Madhu Kinnar, running as an Independent candidate, beat her closest competitor, BJP's Mahaveer Guruji, by over 4,500 votes

to win the election of the Raigarh Municipal Corporation.

Kinnar credits her victory to an outpouring of public support, and vowed to do everything that she can to merit the faith of those who elected her in the primarily conservative and Hindu region of the city of Raigarh.

BIGGAYNEWS FROM CANADA:

Saskatoon Gay Couple First To Be Married in Mennonite Church

CBC News reports that Craig Friesen and Matt Wiens are the first same-sex couple publicly married in a Canadian Mennonite church. The men's wedding marks a point in history for the Mennonite denomination in Canada. Friesen and Wiens are hopeful other GLBT Mennonites will learn from their example that they don't have to choose between their faith and their sexuality. The husbands said: "Our relationship doesn't feel different, but our relationship with our community and with our faith has changed at least a little bit. It was really beautiful and freeing."

BIGGAYNEWS FROM VIETNAM:

Gay Wedding Plans Take Shape After Vietnam Repeals Ban

The *Boston Globe* reports that for medical doctor Thuan Nguyen, Vietnam's trailblazing move among Southeast Asian countries to allow same-sex marriage—although not quite granting the couples full legal status—is enough to plan a wedding ceremony with his boyfriend of two years. Nguyen is among many gay Vietnamese citizens who will be positively affected by the country's new marriage law that, as of New Year's Day, officially did away with regulations that "prohibit marriage between people of the same sex." Although the government will not officially recognize gay marriages yet, it is certainly a step in the right direction for Southeast Asian countries accepting same-sex couples, and eventually giving legal recognition to same-sex marriages. Luong The Huy, a legal officer at the Institute for Studies of Society, Economy and Environment in Hanoi, believes that the step is a sign that Vietnamese society is beginning to accept the GLBT community, and that acceptance will continue to grow with the arrival of the new U.S. ambassador to Vietnam, Ted Osius...a gay man who brings along his husband and son to his new post. ■

Light Speed

As much as I detest them, it's time for one of those end-of-the-year retrospectives/look forward pieces.

Actually, I shouldn't whine: 2014 was quite a year for us transgender folks, maybe even our best year yet.

After all, in June we showed up on the cover of *Time* magazine with the tagline, "The Transgender Tipping Point" in the embodiment of actress Laverne Cox. If nothing else, making the cover of *Time* confirmed that yes, indeed, trans people have finally arrived.

Last year also saw another transwoman-activist, Janet Mock, publish a bestselling memoir and embark on a cross-country speaking tour. She appeared on CNN for interviews with Pierce Morgan two nights in a row; first as the object of Morgan's repeated compliments about her femininity and writing; however, on the second night Mock morphed into an angry and vilifying radical because CNN had audaciously characterized her as having been born male. (And in doing so, Mock yet again confirmed that sometimes, trans people are unpredictable in their public personas—something that yours truly hopes never to be accused of. Alas, that's a story for another day.)

2014 also brought us a *New York* magazine article about Martine Rothblatt, who earned \$38 million last year, making her the highest paid female executive in the country. Rothblatt transitioned from male to female in 1994—a time when the word, "transgender," had barely entered the popular lexicon.

On an entirely different level, last year also saw one more state—Maryland—enact legal protections for gender identity and expression. A number of municipalities, including Miami and Toledo, Ohio, adopted ordinances prohibiting trans discrimination and ensuring for public access according to gender identity rather than birth anatomy.

What's more, just last month, the U.S. Department of Education issued guidelines for trans students, mandating that schools treat transgender students consistent with their gender identity "in all aspects of the planning, implementation, enrollment, operation, and evaluation of single-sex classes."

Here at home, the Minnesota State High School League finally adopted a policy giving trans athletes access to high school sports on the basis of their gender identity. In light of the negativity from right wingers and religious conservatives—which included taking out a full page newspaper ad filled with transphobic lies—I'm bestowing upon the League an extra big gold star for courage.

Finally, in California, opponents failed to repeal a state law that protects trans students and their ability to self-identify for bathroom usage

and sports activities.

I can personally attest that 2014 was a year where trans people showed up. Three months ago, I gave a "Trans 101" presentation to healthcare workers; out of 29 people in the room, four persons had adult children or relatives who identified as transgender and another person self-identified as trans. That's a huge percentage! (17 percent to be exact.)

For months, I've been asking groups that I address, "Who in this room knows a transgender person?" Each time I present, I'm seeing more and more hands raised.

Speaking of numbers, no one really knows how many gender variant people exist in the world. There are all kinds of guesses—a decade-old study puts the number of "transsexuals" (god, how I hate that word) in the United States at 700,000 people. I've seen other numbers suggesting that maybe one percent of the world's population is transgender—with 7 billion people on the planet, that adds up to about 70 million humans, or roughly the population of California two times over.

It's impossible to know how many trans people exist since, until recently, many of us have been scared to death to come out. We didn't want to risk livelihoods, or the love of others, or at the most basic level, personal safety. It was just too risky to show up as one's true self.

Now, everything is different. Those public/media figures inspire people to overcome their fears. Having new trans-friendly laws are public acknowledgements that yes, we too deserve respect. For me, as I close in on (gasp) sixty, all of this is truly amazing. The world—my world—is changing at light speed. It's as if the electric light bulb, telephone, computer, and smart phone were suddenly invented all in a single day.

Yet, I know some will wince at my "light speed" remark; take heart, I agree that in 2015 much remains to be done. Transgender people are protected in only 18 states and D.C. Far too many people (loved ones, bosses, and coworkers) still believe that being trans is a "lifestyle choice," meaning they'll choose to discriminate. We continue to lose too many trans people to violence.

Still, to my T sisters and brothers who remain closeted and afraid of living authentically, please consider one undeniable fact: life is far too short. The daily pain—no, make that misery—that comes from denying your true self will evaporate if you walk out of that dark, horrible closet. Yes, it takes much personal courage, hard work, and a bit of luck. However, authenticity is very achievable in 2015, and with it will come wonderful sunshine and a happiness you never thought possible.

You can trust me on that. ■



Telephone Game

Yesterday, for the first time in months, my landline rang. After being silent for so long, the ring sounded shrill and sinister. Its intrusive tone caused me to feel deeply unsettled. I stared at the phone in trepidation deciding whether to answer it.

I have always hated talking on the phone and resent it whenever it rings. You never know whether it's good news or bad behind that ring. All you know is that if you answer it some disembodied voice will demand that you drop whatever you're doing and have a nice, long chat.

I like nice, long chats, but only on my terms. Those terms usually involve meeting in person over cocktails and having the opportunity to illustrate my points by gesticulating wildly with my hands.

I'm vexed by all the new technology that seems to be developed specifically to thwart my desire to avoid uninvited contact. Each time my computer or cell dings at me with an IM or text, I curl into myself in terror. Whether friend or foe, I consider it a hostile gesture, as if an unexpected intruder materialized into my consciousness, aggressively wielding either a datenut bread or a blunt instrument.

My friends know that the best way to reach me is by email, which allows me to read and return messages when I'm good and ready. I rarely check my cell phone, refuse to acknowledge instant anything, and slam shut my laptop if anyone dares attempt to reach me via Skype or Facetime.

The only reason I have a landline is because my parents demanded it. While they were alive, I considered it the Bat Phone because the only people who had the number were those old bats. When they died, it stopped ringing.

So, imagine my surprise when the phone rang.

If there's anyone who could figure out how to reach me from the afterlife, it's my mother. I'm sure she's got a lot to say about how I've been running my life in the two years since she's died, and a little obstacle like death would not stop her from voicing her fierce objections to the tile I selected for my bathroom remodel or the fact that I've let my hair revert to its primitive state of savage curl.

"It's probably a sales call," I said to myself as the phone continued to ring. But as I put my hand on the receiver, with the thought of picking it up and clicking it off to end the relentless ringing, the vibrations surged through my body, transporting me to a different landline 25 years before.

Suddenly, I found myself in my parents' home—my childhood home—where I lived briefly after college. It was a time before the internet and instant connections, when you had to muster the courage to dial a number and hope that the person you were calling was happy to hear your voice. And if you were on the receiving end, as I often was because I was too cowardly to make the first move, you had to wait patiently for the phone to ring. When it finally did, and you heard that voice on the other end, your heart would literally leap with delight.

Did I always hate the phone? Or did I begin to hate it 25 years ago, when it became distressingly clear that when it rang, she wouldn't be on the other end? Yet, for months (years?), each time the phone rang, I held my breath for a moment hoping that it was her.

Still, as I picked up the phone yesterday, I inhaled deeply and was seized with equal measures of panic and dread. Then I said, "Hello?" ■

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I'm 19 years old. It's winter, 2005.

"Don't forget to take your medicine," my boyfriend says. We're at a steakhouse in downtown Raleigh. "You did bring it, right?"

He rarely takes me on formal dates. He's romantic when he wants to be, but to dress up, open my car door, buy me flowers, take me to a nice restaurant—just the two of us—is unexpected.

I reach into my pocket and fish out a purple and white pill.

"Good. Now go on, Baby, take it before the waitress gets here." He smiles and brushes his foot against my leg.

He's tall and strong-jawed; his arms and chest are powerful; his presence is somehow both domineering and charming. I love these qualities about him—they make me feel safe and are especially attractive when he's sweet.

The pill in question—my "medicine"—is ephedra: illegal in the U.S., the probable cause in many heart-related deaths around the country, and the ultimate appetite suppressant. He requires I take one before every meal, and when I do, I'm nauseous, I experience severe dry mouth, my heart races, I can't think. But it achieves its goal: I eat maybe half of what I would.

I ask, "Can I skip this time?" I want to enjoy my meal.

"Justin," he says in warning.

I know not to press him. I put the pill in my mouth and chase down with water.

I'm underweight for my age. He likes it that way, and that's the way he'll keep it, he tells me; ephedra is the delivery system. He sometimes ships it in from Canada, sometimes buys it from friends, sometimes, I think, even from strangers: whatever it takes to make sure his "baby boy" gets his medicine.

Sometimes I skip a "dose" in his absence and, my body only then realizing how malnourished it is, I eat voraciously, and then suffer regret and fear. He'll find out. He always finds out. The consequences are harsh.

"What do you want to eat?" he asks. This question always sounds like a test.

"Um." I look at the menu and see a \$75 filet mignon. I look at him wide-eyed and innocent—the face I give him when I really, *really* want something. It usually works. He calls it my "puppy-dog face"; his friends call him "whipped" when he responds to it.

"Aw, you can get whatever you want, Baby Doll."

"Can I, um, have the filet mignon?"

He smiles.

"I don't have to, though. It's expensive."

"Of course that's okay. Anything for you."

Our server arrives at our table. She's smitten with my boyfriend the moment he speaks.

Our meal is pleasant. We talk about school, how I'm doing in my classes, what kind of internship I'll take next summer. He tells me he's proud of me—he always does—and that I'm smart and beautiful.

My friends love him, and they're jealous of

me for having him. He is, after all, charming, gorgeous, successful, and sweet. He goes out of his way to make them believe he's perfect, so that if I ever considered leaving him, they'd tell me what a terrible mistake it would be.

His trap is a flawless one, and by the time I realize how abusive he is (the ephedra is only the start), it's too late. Everything is my fault, I know—his fits of rage, threats, all of the horrible things that happen in the bedroom. He apologizes after doing something awful, he promises to change, and then makes me feel guilty for it.

And maybe it *is* my fault. His ploy with my friends is successful; they tell me how grateful I should be for a guy so wonderful and, when I confide in them, say distrustfully, "A guy like him would never do *that*."

An hour into our meal our waitress visits our table and asks and if I'd like my leftovers to go. I look at my plate and realize I've taken only a couple of bites.

I start, "Yes, I wou—"

He interrupts, "No, thank you. But it was delicious. He's just feeling a little sick is all."

She looks at us suspiciously, but for only a moment, before he sweeps her away.

He says to her, "Gosh, your eyes are beautiful. Hope you don't mind me saying so." His Southern accent and the subtle crackle in his voice are irresistible. She blushes as she snaps up my plate, and scurries away. He turns to me and winks.

"I love you, Little Darlin'," he says. "I love you so much." ■